

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze**

**'The Magic Drum' in action:**

**The use of creative arts to foster positive  
peer interaction among children with diverse  
abilities and needs in primary school**

**Min See Leong**

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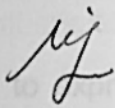
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2010

## Declaration

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all the people who have been very encouraging and supportive to me in my journey to complete this dissertation.

First and foremost, I wish to dedicate my sincerest appreciation to the participants, *I, Min See Leong declare that I developed this dissertation independently with the use of the resources listed in my bibliography.* my research school. For my supervisor PhD guidance and encouragement. Special thanks to my critical friend and confidante, Anna who has given me very practical comments and emotional support.



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Last but not least, I would like to thank the European Commission for the scholarship to pursue this course.

### **Acknowledgements**

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First and foremost, I wish to dedicate my sincerest appreciation to the participants, SENCO, drama teacher, head teacher and IT Coordinator of my research school. For tutor support, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to my supervisor PhD. Libor Novosad for his constructive comments, guidance and encouragement. Special thanks to my critical friend and camera lady Anna who has given me very practical comments and emotional support.

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## Abstract

Research evidence indicates that children with various SEN experience peer rejection, victimization and bullying which could lead to long term negative social and psychological consequences. Therefore, early and effective interventions to promote positive relationship among SEN and non-SEN children are needed.

This study is a small-scale exploratory study using storytelling, dramatic play, child-friendly questionnaire, group interview, video recording and showcase to investigate the use of creative arts in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children in a primary school. Participants enacted the roles of disabled children in the story of 'The Magic Drum' which aims to sensitize their empathetic understanding towards disabled children. The research process emphasized collaborative creative work, empathetic understanding and cooperation.

The findings are theoretically coherent with contemporary learning theories, reflective learning and emotional literacy. The findings suggest that the creative arts intervention engaged participants in peer collaborative learning and reflective learning which contributed to the development of participants' emotional literacy. The findings demonstrate the potential of the creative arts intervention in cultivating participants' empathetic understanding towards SEN peers which is essential for fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. The findings also indicate the needs to emphasize the strengths of the disabled characters, the creative and reflective elements of the intervention.

This study identified four important factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention which are appropriate matching of the intervention to meet the specific needs of participants, active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants, reflexivity of researcher and collaboration with school teachers. This study also contributes to the growing body of research evidence on good practice in researching children's experiences.

**Key words:** peer interaction; social inclusion; creative arts intervention; storytelling; dramatic play; empathetic understanding; collaboration; reflexivity

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## 1.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the rationale of this study. The first section introduces the

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter explains the rationale of this study. The first section introduces the research topic. The second section elaborates on the definition of children with diverse abilities and needs, disabled children and special educational needs (SEN) children. The third section describes Malaysian context in the development of inclusive education. The fourth section explains the rationale for choosing the research topic. The final section explains the significance of this study.

## **1.1 The Magic Drum<sup>1</sup>**

'Once upon a time, there was a special village in a far away country. What made it special was there were quite a number of villagers who were different from others. They had different abilities and needs. Among them were children. Some of these children were very good at singing and acting although they had difficulties with spelling or mathematic. Some of them were very good swimmers although they were very active. Some of them were very helpful and caring although they were disabled.

These children went to school just like all of you. But they faced a number of challenges in schools because they were different. Sometimes, they felt very frustrated and upset when they were struggling to learn and make friends in school.

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<sup>1</sup> When I brain stormed the kinds of activity I would like to conduct in a London school in 2009, my imagination flowed smoothly and the story of 'The Magic Drum' began to form its shape in my mind.

One night, one of the children had a dream. She dreamt of her grandmother who had passed away. The grandmother was a very wise and well-respected woman in the village. Her grandmother told her in the dream, "My beloved granddaughter, I know you are struggling with your schooling because you are different. At the eastern part of the village, there is a thick forest. There is a magic drum in the forest which has special powers. If all the children from the village hit it together at the same time a miracle will happen.

It is a very challenging journey. You have to go through the thick forest where unknown danger and adventure await you. You cannot do it alone. You can invite all the children in the village to go with you to search for the magic drum. You have to work as a team to help each other in this journey."

The child woke up in excitement. She quickly spread the news and invited all the children to join her in the journey. All of them decided that they were going to take up the challenge...'

Research evidence indicates that children with various SEN across different countries experience peer rejection, victimization and bullying which could lead to long term negative social and psychological consequences. For inclusion to be put into good practice and to yield effective results, early and effective interventions to promote positive relationship among SEN and non-SEN children is needed. This research aims to investigate the use of creative arts in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children in a primary school in Prague.

## **1.2 The definition of children with diverse abilities and needs, disabled children and special educational needs (SEN) children in this research**

All children have abilities including SEN children. It is our collective responsibility as a society to focus on children diverse abilities and facilitate their self growth to bring out the best in them. In order to cultivate positive self identity among SEN children, we need to advocate positive term such as 'children with diverse abilities and needs' which acknowledges the diverse abilities inherent in SEN children while recognizing their individual needs.

In this study, 'children with diverse abilities and needs' refer to all children including disabled or SEN children. 'Disabled' or 'SEN' children refer to children whose access to equal education opportunities are restricted due to physical and social barriers.

## **1.3 The researcher's context in Malaysia**

Although Malaysian government is a signatory to Salamanca Statement 1994 (MOE, 2010), SEN children in Malaysia still struggle to get access to equal education opportunities due to 'exclusive' policies, practices and socially constructed realities.

### **1.3.1 Barriers to inclusive education in Malaysia**

Disability policies and practices in Malaysia are still deeply influenced by medical model<sup>2</sup>. Disabled children are perceived negatively as having deficit that need to be

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<sup>2</sup> Medical model perceives disabled people as 'sick' or 'abnormal' and their impairment is considered the principal cause of their economic and social deprivation (Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002). Medical model of disabilities has been criticized for its failure to acknowledge that most of the difficulties encountered by disabled people such as education and employment are politically and socially constructed.

'corrected'. Severely disabled children are placed in special institutions to receive rehabilitation and skills training focus on pre-vocational, vocational and labour training (MWFCF, 2009) which does not equip them to join the work force.

Ministry of Education (MOE) adopts segregated system by setting up special primary and secondary schools for SEN children. Since 1981, MOE implements Special Education Integration Programme by setting up special classes programme in mainstream primary and secondary schools, technical and vocational secondary schools for students with visual, auditory and learning disabilities (MOE, 2008). Malaysia National Report indicated that SEN students are placed in 32 special schools and 1282 integrated program (Ibid). Majority of students with visual, and auditory disabilities are segregated in special schools or special classes whereas majority of students with learning disabilities are segregated in special classes (Ibid).

MOE adopts the model of integration in its efforts to include SEN children in mainstream education. This is reflected in Special Education Regulations (1997) which expect SEN children to prove that they are able to fit into existing curriculum and classroom structures in order to attend mainstream education:

"A pupil with special needs is educable if he is able to manage himself without help and is confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the Ministry of Education and officer from the Department of Welfare, as capable of undergoing the national educational program". (SED, 2006)

Currently the decision to include SEN children in mainstream education depends entirely on the initiative of the school (MOE, 2008). Some SEN students are included fully in the mainstream education whereas some are included for certain subjects. The degree of inclusion depends on each student's ability to cope with mainstream learning. School expects SEN children to be able to manage themselves without help, and not to have behavioural conditions that could cause disruption to mainstream learning (Ibid).

These criteria for inclusion is not in line with Salamanca Statement (UNESCO,1994) which advocates equal education opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, socio-economic, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Moreover, physical facilities, transportation and school-based supports and resources to accommodate SEN children are limited in majority of mainstream schools (Leong, 2010). Majority of mainstream schools are not wheel-chair accessible and there is no itinerant specialist support (Ibid). The average class size of about 40 students presents as a challenge to inclusive education (Ibid).

Teachers who are trained, skilled and committed to inclusive education remain a minority around the world (Inclusion International, 2009). Majority of the mainstream teachers in Malaysia lack the confidence, commitment and practical skills to teach SEN children (Jelas, 2000) partly due to big class size, rigid curriculum that over-emphasizes the development of left brain, standardized national examination, overload administrative work and the pressure to produce 'A' students (Leong, 2010).

Stigmatization and discrimination affect the social and cultural status of disabled children and their parents in many countries (Inclusion International, 2009). General public in Malaysia usually encounter SEN children with their tinted sympathy or prejudice (Adnan, & Hafiz, 2001). Some parents argue that their 'normal' children imitate the 'weird' behavior of SEN children and pressure the school to transfer SEN children to special class or special school (Leong, 2010).

The 'exclusive' policies, 'inadequate' education system, negative diagnosis and labeling, and segregated education system continue to impart the existing 'tinted' stigmatization and discrimination toward SEN children in Malaysia, further limit their educational opportunities and restrict their life chances (Leong, 2010).



### **1.3.2 Development toward inclusive education in Malaysia**

In order to cultivate inclusive education, human right and inclusive movement need to grow in strength to ensure Malaysia continue to progress towards an inclusive and rights-based society (Leong, 2010). "Achieving inclusive education is a 'struggle' that takes place in 'power relations' because of all the interests involved" (Inclusion International, 2009: p.117). Public support forms the foundation for political changes and education reform. Inclusive movement in Malaysia has started some initiatives to gain greater public support.

Disabled people themselves are the best experts to create practical solutions to the problems of disability (Oliver, & Barnes, 2008). Self advocacy groups in Malaysia led by persons with learning disabilities such as United Voice<sup>3</sup> have started to share their struggle and success of their life stories with wider audience by publishing books and creating their website (Leong, 2010).

Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Malaysia have initiated partnership with some mainstream schools to support their SEN pupils (Leong, 2010). Local and international speakers have been sharing their inspiring inclusive stories and good practices (Ibid). Local-to-regional-to-global networks to share information, technology and financing have been instigated (Ibid). For example, UNICEF and MOE are working collaboratively to reduce dropout rates among indigenous children by introducing indigenous folklore into the curriculum (UNICEF, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup> In 2005 United Voice (UV) registered as the first society led by persons with learning disabilities in Malaysia. UV membership includes persons with down syndrome, autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy and global developmental delay. UV is a multicultural society with members from Malays, Indians, Chinese and other ethnic groups.



Despite all the initiatives and efforts, Malaysia is still far behind real inclusion. Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>4</sup> (CRPD) has only been enforced since April this year (MWFCF, 2010). Continuous efforts to pressure government to ratify Article 24 of the CRPD to provide education to disabled children on an equal basis within an inclusive system is needed (Leong, 2010).

Most importantly, we need to continue the efforts to cultivate a climate of acceptance, respect and empathy in children with diverse abilities and needs. We need to take greater responsibility to create an inclusive society for all children to truly enjoy equal education opportunities.

## **1.4 Rationale for research**

### **1.4.1 The needs for fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children**

The relationships between SEN and non-SEN children can be a barrier and an enabler to the successful inclusion of SEN children in mainstream schools. A three-year systematic literature review indicates that social engagement is vital in enhancing the academic and social inclusion of SEN children (Rix, Hall, Nind, Sheehy, & Wearmouth, 2009). Studies in Cyprus (Koutrouba, Vamvakari, & Steliou, 2006), UK (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007) and Malaysia (Jelas, 2000) indicate that the success of inclusion depends to a great extent on the attitude of non-SEN children towards their SEN classmates.

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<sup>4</sup>The Minister of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCF, 2010) announced on 02-03-10 that Malaysia will be ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in April 2010. Two areas targeted for 2010 are accessibility and employment.

Peer acceptance is recognized as an essential feature of an inclusive school. In UK, peer relationships among SEN and non-SEN children have been identified as one of the factors to evaluate the outcome of inclusion (Frederickson *et al.*, 2007). In Cyprus, the new legislation recognizes social interaction as one of the key factors to foster the inclusion of SEN children in mainstream schools (Koutrouba *et al.*, 2006).

Nevertheless, often in mainstream schools, SEN children are in the classroom but not Parents in UK (Frederickson *et al.*, 2007), Northern Ireland (O'Connor, 2007), Netherlands (Koster, Pijl, van Houten, & Nakken, 2007; Monchy, Pijl, & Zandberg, 2004) and Malaysia (Jelas, 2000) often hope for the potential opportunities for their SEN children to develop social competence and friendships in mainstream schools. Some parents however are concerned with the issue of peer rejection and bullying (O'Connor, 2007).

Studies in UK (Norwich, & Kelly, 2004) and Canada (Bunch, & Valeo, 2004) indicate that friendships occur between SEN and non-SEN children when SEN children are placed in mainstream schools instead of special schools. Friendships provide companionship, support, nurturance, a sense of self-worth and belonging to SEN children in mainstream schools.

Study in UK on 54 young people with specific language impairment indicated that friendships provided support and companionship to them (Palikara, Lindsay, & Dockrell, 2009). Another research in UK on 13 SEN children revealed that peer relationships determined the positive or negative experiences SEN children have of school (Maxwell, 2006). Study in Northern Ireland indicated that friendships made SEN children feel included in mainstream schools (Ryan, 2009). Research in Malaysia revealed that friendships motivated SEN children to attend school (Jelas, 2000).

Peer acceptance and friendships protect children against the risk of externalizing problems (Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004), rejection and victimization (Fox, & Boulton, 2006; Hay *et al.*, 2004). Study in UK indicated that friends helped to facilitate a positive

sense of self for asperger young people (Humphrey, & Lewis, 2008). Friends stood up for them when they were bullied by typical peers (Ibid). Study in Canada showed that friends helped to reduce the risk of being bullied for young people with speech and language difficulties (Savage, 2005).

Nevertheless, often in mainstream schools, SEN children are 'in' the classroom but not 'of' the classroom (Ferguson, 2008). Full-time inclusion placement without interventions does not lead to peer acceptance (Gibb, Tunbridge, Chua, & Frederickson, 2007; Mpofu, 2003).

Studies confirm peer rejection as a significant issue facing children with various SEN across different countries, including asperger children in UK (Humphrey *et al.*, 2008; Osler, 2002); children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in German (Mand, 2007), Netherlands (Monchy *et al.*, 2004) and Canada (Desbiens, & Royer, 2003); children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in US (Hoza, Gerdes, Mrug, Hinshaw, Bukowski, Gold, *et al.*, 2005); children who stutter in Canada (Langevin, Kleitman, Packman, & Onslow, 2009) and UK (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002); children with speech and language difficulties in Canada (Savage, 2005); children with learning difficulties in UK (Walker, & Nabuzoka, 2007; Nabuzoka, 2003; Frederickson, & Furnham, 2001); children with learning disabilities in Cyprus (Nicolaidou, Sophocleous, and Phtiaka, 2006), Turkey (Baydik, & Bakkaloglu, 2009), US (Pavri and Monda-Amaya, 2001) and Croatia (Zic, & Igric, 2001); and children with physical disabilities in Canada (Pivik, McComas, and LaFlamme, 2002).

Studies draw evidence from peer reports of willingness to interact with SEN pupils consistently reveal that SEN pupils are more rejected than their typical peers. This has been found across different countries, including UK (Walker *et al.*, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2007; Davis *et al.*, 2002; Frederickson *et al.*, 2001), US (Estell, Farmer, Irvin, Crowther, Akos, & Boudah, 2009), Netherlands (Koster *et al.*, 2007; Monchy *et al.*,

2004), Norway (Frostada, & Pijl, 2007); German (Mand, 2007), Turkey (Baydik *et al.*, 2009), Canada (Desbiens *et al.*, 2003) and Croatia (Zic *et al.*, 2001).

Research literature also reveals higher levels of bullying and victimisation of SEN children than non-SEN peers across various SEN in different countries, including asperger children in UK (Humphrey *et al.*, 2008; Osler, 2002); children with autistic spectrum disorder in UK (Frederickson *et al.*, 2007); EBD children in Netherlands (Monchy *et al.*, 2004); children with learning difficulties in UK (Nabuzoka, 2003); dyslexic children in UK (Humphrey, 2003); children with learning disabilities in UK (Norwich *et al.*, 2004) and US (Estell *et al.*, 2009); children with physical disabilities in Canada (Pivik *et al.*, 2002); children who stutter in UK (Davis *et al.*, 2002) and children with speech and language difficulties in Canada (Savage, 2005).

Research studies in UK (Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004) and Netherlands (Koster *et al.*, 2007; Monchy *et al.*, 2004) show that teachers tend to seriously underestimate peer rejection and bullying encountered by SEN pupils.

Research literature indicates that children who experience peer victimization tend to be at risk of experiencing social and psychological difficulties such as depression at some time throughout their lives (Klima, & Repetti, 2008; Sweeting, Young, West, & Der, 2006; Ladd, 2006; Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004; Whittaker, 2004; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Seals, & Young, 2003).

A study with 884 adults from Spain, Germany and UK indicated that former victims of bullying in school scored lower on general self-esteem and higher on emotional loneliness, and reported more difficulties in maintaining friendships than non-victims, irrespective of gender, profession and cultural differences (Schäfer, Korn, Smith, Hunter, Mora-Merchán, Singer, *et al.*, 2004).

Bullying and victimisation expose children to adverse or painful interpersonal processes. A longitudinal study across a seven-year period on 385 children across the 5 to 12 age period supported the argument that peer rejection contributes to children's psychological maladjustment (Ladd, 2006).

Meta-analysis on 15 studies indicated that students with learning disabilities had significantly higher depression scores than students without learning disabilities (Maag, & Reid, 2006). Studies in Israel (Lackaye, & Margalit, 2006) and Australia (Hogan, McLellan, & Bauman, 2000) revealed that students with learning disabilities felt socially isolated, depressed and lonelier than their typical peers.

Study in Australia showed that depressive symptoms were a significant issue for asperger young people (Hedley, & Young, 2006). Another study in Israel indicated that high-functioning autistic children reported higher degrees of loneliness than their typical peers (Bauminger, Shulman, & Agam, 2003).

Study on 20 asperger young people in England revealed that bullying such as physical violence and teasing occurred with alarming regularity (Humphrey *et al.*, 2008). One participant's drawing of his peer having party after his death indicated worrying psychological harm due to consistent bullying (Ibid).

Research literature reveals that peer rejection, victimization and bullying can lead to negative long term social and psychological consequences on SEN children. It is therefore crucial to implement early and effective interventions to foster positive peer interactions among SEN and non-SEN children.

#### **1.4.2 Relevance of research to my professional practice**

In Malaysia, peer rejection can have a negative effect on the efforts to foster inclusion for SEN children. My experience as a play therapist in Malaysia, working in liaison with parents and other practitioners to support SEN children in mainstream schools has



deepened my understanding of the challenges faced in fostering social inclusion for SEN children.

Majority of the mainstream teachers in Malaysia are pressured with fixed curriculum constraints and examination-led approaches. They also lack the confidence and practical skills in facilitating positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. Conflicts and physical fighting among SEN and non-SEN children have been an ongoing issue in Malaysia, resulting in some mainstream teachers and parents recommending that SEN children be transferred to special schools or special classes.

Learning experiences from other countries indicate that true inclusion will not be achieved if policy has moved fast from complete segregation to majority integration without adequate support (Inclusion International, 2009). In Malaysia there is a lack of interventions aiming at facilitating positive peer interactions among SEN and non-SEN children. Little attention is devoted to prepare non-SEN peers and their parents for accepting SEN children in mainstream classrooms.

NGOs are always taking the lead to facilitate inclusion in Malaysia. My NGO has been working with a few mainstream schools to offer resources and interventions to support SEN children. Case conference with teachers, family counseling, individual or group therapy and additional learning lessons are conducted by my NGO to support SEN children in mainstream schools.

Recently, my NGO has initiated creative arts intervention to facilitate social inclusion for SEN children. This research will grant me an opportunity to develop a critical understanding of the use of creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interactions among SEN and non-SEN children. The key lessons learnt from this study would enable me to develop the creative arts intervention which my NGO can apply to create an inclusive school ethos in Malaysia.



The rationale for this study has been grounded in SEN children's human right to inclusive education, research evidence of negative peer interaction between SEN and non-SEN children, and the prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people due to peer rejection, victimization and bullying.

### **1.5 Significance of research**

While there is a growing literature about various interventions to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs, research studies in the use of creative arts intervention are very limited. The current study addresses this gap and contributes to knowledge in developing a creative arts intervention which celebrates the concept of diversity to cultivate positive peer interactions among children with diverse abilities and needs.

Based on the belief that children are capable of forming views and their voices need to be heard and respected (UN, 1989), this research uses child-centred research tool which is storytelling, dramatic play, child-friendly questionnaire, group interview, video recording and showcase to facilitate active engagement with children participants. The findings offer useful insights into children's learning experience in creative arts intervention. The research also contributes to the growing body of research evidence on good practice in researching children's experiences.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the literature review of this study. The first section provides an up-to-date overview of evidence-based interventions that have been implemented in schools to facilitate positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. The second section elaborates important elements to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. The third section illustrates the theoretical discussion of the use of creative arts in children's learning experiences.

### **2.1 Interventions to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children**

Numerous intervention studies aiming at fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children have appeared in the literature. These interventions include social skills training engaging SEN children and social skills training engaging SEN and non-SEN children. There is also an increasing emphasis on developing interventions that create an inclusive classroom and school ethos. Some of these interventions have utilized different creative mediums such as storytelling, drawing, role-playing and video recording.

#### **2.1.1 Social skills interventions engaging SEN children**

Majority of interventions aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children tend to emphasize social skills training as some SEN children lack appropriate social skills to establish positive peer relationships. For example, children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) are at higher risk of being bullied due to their difficulties in communication and interaction (Humphrey, 2008).

### **Social story**

Social story intervention is empirically validated and widely used especially with ASD children (Humphrey, 2008; Barry, & Burlew, 2004). Social stories describe a character that the focus child may identify with and describe the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of the character accomplishing a target behavioral. It also explains other people's thoughts, feelings and reactions in a situation and provides information about appropriate social responses. The goal of a social story is to share accurate social information in a simple, patient and encouraging manner to its audience (Gray, 2010).

Social stories intervention with five autistic children (Delano, & Snell, 2006; Barry *et al.*, 2004) and a hyperlexic<sup>5</sup> child in US (Soenksen, & Alper, 2006) indicated that social stories intervention increased participants' abilities to engage with non-SEN peers. Generalization to classroom setting was observed (Ibid).

Social stories have several strengths. Social stories take complex skills and break them into smaller and simpler parts related to each child's unique experience (Barry *et al.*, 2004). Social stories are short and can be presented in both words and images to the focus child and non-SEN peers in a classroom setting. Photographs of the focus child, the peers and the classroom setting can be embedded in social stories to make the stories more attractive. It is child-centred as children generally enjoy listening to stories. Moreover, it can be tailored to the reading level and interests of the focus child.

### **Video modeling**

Video modeling encourages children to imitate target behavior after observing the videotape of a model engaging in the target behavior. Video modeling has been used to

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<sup>5</sup> Children with hyperlexia refer to children whose reading level far exceeds their level of comprehension (Soenksen, & Alper, 2006). Many children with hyperlexia exhibit challenging behaviors such as noncompliant and short attention span (Ibid).

teach a wide variety of skills to children across a range of disabilities and ages (Maione, & Mirenda, 2006).

A review on sixteen research studies suggested that video modeling is effective for EBD children in increasing peer interaction and on-task behavior, and decreasing inappropriate behavior (Baker, Lang, & O'Reilly, 2009). Video modeling have also been effective in teaching autistic children a variety of adaptive behaviors including social, play, self-care and academic skills (Maione *et al.*, 2006).

Video modeling intervention with four severely autistic children in a special school in Northern Ireland showed that video modeling enhanced participants' social initiation skills and reciprocal play engagement (Nikopoulos, & Keenan, 2007). These behavior changes generalized across peers and time (Ibid).

#### **Video modeling and self-monitoring**

Self-monitoring teaches SEN children to discriminate and record the occurrence of a target behavior to increase the desired behaviors. Self-monitoring increases independence and encourages self-control, which are important qualities to contribute to positive long term effects. In order to self-monitor, SEN children learn to pay adequate attention to their own behavior, the conditions under which these behaviors occur and the immediate effects of the behaviour.

Video modeling and self-monitoring intervention with four ASD children in US showed an increase in participants' compliment-giving initiations and responses following intervention (Lowy Apple, Billingsley, & Schwartz, 2005).

Video modeling intervention has several strengths. It is easy to implement and can be readily incorporated into classroom routine. Many SEN children enjoy watching videotapes and it is effective for children who have difficulties understanding verbal instructions (Maione *et al.*, 2006). It can be individualized to demonstrate desired skills

in relevant contexts and may be particularly effective with children from diverse cultural background (Baker *et al.*, 2009).

Combination of video modeling and self-monitoring enhances participant's ability to accept responsibility for his or her own behavior. Nevertheless, the production of video is time consuming. Extensive editing is needed when the peer is the model of the video (Lowy Apple *et al.*, 2005).

### **2.1.2 Social skills interventions engaging SEN and non-SEN children**

Interventions to increase social skills of SEN children have shifted from adult-directed to peer-based strategies (Bass, & Mulick, 2007; Frederickson, & Turner, 2003; Rogers, 2000). This shift is due to the limitations associated with adult-directed and highly structured interventions, resulted in dependency on adult prompting and poor skill generalization to ordinary situations, people or tasks (Rogers, 2000).

#### **Peer-mediated Interventions**

Social interaction is fundamentally reciprocal and peers' engagement is crucial in social skills training for SEN children. Peer-mediated interventions enable SEN children to learn social skills in natural classroom environments with their non-SEN peers. Peers role-play with adults to learn the social skills of sharing, suggesting play ideas, assisting, being affectionate and giving compliments before they model and reinforce appropriate social behavior to SEN children (Lee, Odom, & Loftin, 2007).

Peer-mediated interventions have been used to foster specific social skills in ASD children (Whitaker, 2004; Rogers, 2000; Bass *et al.*, 2007) and ADHD children (DuPaul, & Weyandt, 2006). Peer-mediated intervention in UK involving ten children with severe autism, educated in a unit attached to a mainstream school revealed that autistic participants enjoyed the sessions and their positive relationships with their non-SEN peers were increased following the intervention (Whitaker, 2004). Studies with five autistic children in US (Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008; Owen-DeSchryver, Carr, Cale, &



Blakeley-Smith, 2008) and three autistic children in South Korea (Lee *et al.*, 2007) showed that peer-mediated intervention was effective in increasing social interactions for autistic children.

Peer-mediated intervention has several strengths. The availability of peers creates more frequent and natural opportunities for children to learn from multiple and varied play activities (Bass *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, non-SEN peers acquire the appropriate social skills to interact with their SEN peers which contribute to increased social interaction between them over time (Terpstra, & Tamura, 2008). Increased social interaction enables SEN children especially ASD children to practice their social skills (DiSalvo, & Oswald, 2002). Most importantly, peer-mediated intervention creates a snowball effect where untrained non-SEN peers also increase their social interaction with SEN children (Owen-DeSchryver *et al.*, 2008).

Nevertheless, implementation of peer-mediated intervention is complex as it requires training for non-SEN peers, monitoring the teaching phase where trained peers model appropriate social skills to SEN children, and reinforcing the acquired social skills on SEN children (Bass *et al.*, 2007). Some schools may lack the human resources to implement peer-mediated intervention. Furthermore, there is a lack of reciprocal relationship between SEN children and their trained peers. SEN children are consistently being the recipients of support rather than equal participants in peer-mediated relationship. It is equally important to provide opportunities for SEN children to be tutors in peer-mediated intervention.

### **Multi-component Social Skills Intervention**

A multi-component social skills intervention in US including peer training, explicit instruction in how to initiate social interactions and self-monitoring showed that the intervention increased social initiations and interactions for all three autistic participants (Loftin, Odom, & Lantz, 2008).



### **Naturalistic multi-component social skills intervention**

A naturalistic multi-component intervention using social stories, individual lessons on social interactions and simple peer modeling with an asperger boy in Australia showed that the intervention contributed to improved social interaction between the asperger child and his non-SEN peers (Choi, & Nieminen, 2008). The individual lessons involved discussion, watching videotapes and reading books on friendship and social manners, and drawing faces with different emotions (Ibid). Volunteered peers learnt in child-centred manner how to include and play with the asperger boy during classroom and playground activities (Ibid).

The most important strength of naturalistic multi-component intervention is that non-SEN peers realize that their SEN peers enjoy the same games that they like and they learn to be patient when helping SEN children. Furthermore, naturalistic multi-component intervention has been effective in generalization as it involves loosely structured sessions initiated and paced by the child, with a variety of stimuli, in various locations in school (Cowan, & Allen, 2007).

### **2.1.3 Interventions to foster inclusive ethos in school environment**

In the past, interventions to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children tend to emphasize social skills training on SEN children. These interventions relate peer rejection to individual limitations and deficits of SEN children (Hoza *et al.*, 2005) which reflects the influences of medical model of disability. With the development of social model of disability<sup>6</sup>, advocates of inclusion have argued that it is equally

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<sup>6</sup> Social model of disability was generated by disability movement led by disabled people in Britain during 1960s and 1970s (Barnes *et.al*, 2002). Social model argues that disabled people are 'disabled' by society's failure to accommodate their needs. Social model identifies political, economic and social barriers while acknowledging the implications of impairment to disabled people's lives.

important to promote an inclusive classroom and school ethos to foster peer acceptance. This leads to the development of intervention programmes focuses on non-SEN children to cultivate in them greater understanding and acceptance of their SEN peers.

### **Read aloud intervention**

Study on 78 Latino/a children in US revealed that read aloud intervention was effective in positively influencing children's attitudes toward SEN peers (Martinez, & Carspecken, 2006). The intervention was conducted on six occasions over a five-week period (Ibid). Each session began with a brief introduction of the book and an overview of 3-5 basic facts about the disability featured in the book, followed by read aloud activity and group discussion (Ibid).

Read aloud intervention has several strengths. It portrays positive and realistic images of SEN children, and highlights similarities between SEN and non-SEN children to promote greater understanding and acceptance of SEN children. It is practical, cost-effective and requires a minimal amount of time. Teachers can easily embed the intervention in the classroom routine. Furthermore, it is interactive and child-centred as children generally like storytelling.

### **Video-based intervention**

Study on video-based intervention in US revealed that participants showed greater changes in knowledge, positive attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward a peer with Tourette Syndrome (TS) compared to control group (Holtz, & Tessman, 2007). The video presents accurate and developmentally appropriate information about TS by highlighting similarities between individuals with and without TS and the impact of TS on a child's life (Ibid).

The strength of video-based intervention is that it emphasizes similarities between SEN and non-SEN children to foster greater acceptance of SEN children. Furthermore, it is cost efficient, often readily available, require no special training to implement and can

easily be embedded in the classroom routine. It is also child-centred as children usually enjoy watching video.

### **Circle of friends**

Circle of friends intervention engages with SEN classroom peers to establish support networks that develop into natural friendships (Frederickson *et al.*, 2003). Weekly group meetings facilitated by an adult are typically held over a period of 6 to 10 weeks, involving SEN child and four to eight non-SEN peers to identify target goals and strategies to be implemented by the group (Ibid).

Study in UK involving 20 EBD children in 15 different primary schools indicated that the intervention increased peer acceptance of SEN children, changed peers' perceptions and judgments about SEN children and supported SEN children to achieve their target goals (Frederickson *et al.*, 2003). Another study with five autistic preschoolers in UK showed that SEN participants displayed significantly higher successful response and initiation rates at post-intervention and follow-up than those in the control group (Kalyva, & Avramidis, 2005).

Circle of friends intervention has several strengths. It recognizes the positive attributes of SEN children and generates greater understanding of SEN children's difficulties thus contribute to greater acceptance of SEN children. It also engages peers and teachers familiar to SEN children in the school settings.

Nevertheless, there is a clear lack of reciprocity in circles of friends' relationships, with SEN children consistently being recipients of support rather than equal participants with the circle members (Frederickson *et al.*, 2003). Circle members may take on more responsibility than is appropriate (Ibid). Furthermore, the potential for negative labeling of SEN children should be carefully considered alongside the potential benefits of the intervention (Ibid).

### **Multi-component intervention**

A multi-component intervention consisted of read aloud intervention, exhibition, peer buddy and whole school participatory games in a Cyprus primary school showed that non-SEN peers exhibited more positive attitudes towards SEN classmates following the intervention (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). More non-SEN peers stated that they would make every effort to include their SEN classmates during playtime activities (Ibid). Most of the non-SEN peers stressed that SEN children share the same rights to equal education opportunities (Ibid).

The intervention engaged a group of eleven-year-old pupils as pupil-researchers and co-educators (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). Teachers of pupils aged 10 and 11 read and discussed SEN issues in posters, fairytales, essays and literature with their pupils in their own time when it was convenient (Ibid). Pupils were invited to read and discuss a fairytale on diversity which was installed in each classroom's computer (Ibid). An 11-year-old pupil befriended one of his SEN classmates and helped to bring other non-SEN pupils to play with them (Ibid).

A two-day exhibition on 'Olympic and Para-Olympic Games' was set up in school (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). The whole school participated in playing a list of team building Cypriot traditional games and it was the first time all the SEN pupils took part in an activity organized by the school as a whole (Ibid).

The intervention enabled SEN and non-SEN pupils to interact and work as a team in child-centred activities. Most importantly, it actively engaged peers and teachers to transform the structures and practices of schools to create an inclusive school ethos for inclusion.

## **2.2 Important elements to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children**

Various interventions aiming at promoting positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children have been implemented. These interventions are most effective when delivered in a comprehensive and holistic approach which include interventions that match the specific needs of children; active engagement with SEN and non-SEN children; teachers' continuous efforts to cultivate inclusive values, and most importantly, whole school approach to create an inclusive school ethos.

### **2.2.1 Appropriate matching of the intervention to meet the specific needs of children**

The nature of a child's disability inevitably affects the development of peer relationship, therefore targeted intervention that meets the specific needs of SEN child is crucial to ensure successful social inclusion (Gibb *et al.*, 2007).

Meta-analyses indicate that social skills interventions are only minimally effective for SEN children (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007). Gresham *et al.* (2001) asserted that appropriate matching of the intervention strategy with the type of skill deficit is the key component of effective social skills interventions.

Inclusive school settings are ideal situations to teach social skills as these settings provide naturalistic spaces where SEN children can learn through modeling from their non-SEN peers and teacher-led direct instruction. Teaching non-SEN children appropriate strategies to interact with SEN children can contribute to the development of positive peer relationships among SEN and non-SEN children over time.

Social skill intervention is most successful when the intervention is implemented using multi-modal approaches, naturalistic settings, positive peer models, and socially valid skills (Spence, 2003). Social skills intervention engaging non-SEN peers should involve non-SEN peers at every stage of the design, delivery and evaluation of the intervention



to promote a sense of ownership of the intervention (Ibid). Social skill intervention needs to be culturally appropriate and match the communication styles of the focus child (Ibid).

Research suggests that emphasis on social skills training alone is unlikely to produce significant and lasting changes in promoting positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children (Frostada *et al.*, 2007; Spence, 2003). Interventions that engage SEN and non-SEN children to cultivate an inclusive school ethos are more effective in facilitating positive peer relationships among them.

### **2.2.2 Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN children**

It is vital to engage SEN and non-SEN children when implementing interventions to promote social inclusion for SEN children. In general, children prefer peers who share something in common with them in terms of dress, language, behavior and ability (Boutot, 2007). Non-SEN children tend to interact with each other rather than with SEN children (Bass *et al.*, 2007; Favazza, & Phillipsen, 2000). Lack of interaction between the two groups of children leads to misunderstanding and misconceptions.

Majority of non-SEN children do not understand the nature of the special needs and difficulties encountered by their SEN peers. Some non-SEN children avoid their SEN peers because of the fear and insecure feelings they experience when they are with SEN peers and the 'mysterious' behavior shown by their SEN peers (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). Lack of awareness tends to lead to peer rejection (Ibid).

Research findings suggest that non-SEN children hold negative attitudes towards SEN children (Hodkinson, 2007; Laws, & Kelly, 2005; Swaim, Morgan, Lenhart, Hyder, Zimmerman, & Pevsner, 2001). Study in UK revealed that non-SEN children tended to view their peers with learning difficulties as disruptive, starting fights, and help-seeking (Walker *et al.*, 2007). A multi-modal intervention with 285 ADHD children in US showed that even though the behavior of ADHD children improved with treatment, peers may

often resistant to change their perceptions and feelings toward a child whom they reject (Hoza *et al.*, 2005).

Children interpret peer relationships and respond differently to SEN peers based on their belief and values (Hay *et al.*, 2004). Non-SEN peers may response positively or negatively toward SEN children depending on the extent to which SEN children are perceived as being responsible for their non-normative characteristics (Hennessy, Swords, & Heary, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2007; Coplan, Girardi, Findlay, & Frohlick, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2001).

It is therefore crucial to engage with non-SEN children to educate them about the nature of SEN to diffuse their anxieties, fear and stigmatization. Non-SEN children tend to empathize and accept their SEN peers when they understand that their SEN peers cannot control some of their own behavior (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). Effective interventions highlight the strengths of SEN children and cultivate empathetic understanding to support the difficulties encountered by SEN children (Frederickson *et al.*, 2007). Non-SEN peers are informed about the strengths of SEN children, their favourite sports, leisure activities and hobbies to emphasize the similarities shared among SEN and non-SEN children (Gibb *et al.*, 2007).

Non-SEN peers play vital roles in promoting social inclusion for SEN children. Non-SEN peers can become the buddy of SEN children by staying, playing and talking with SEN children. The peer buddy approach has contributed to increased social interactions among SEN and Non-SEN children in UK (Jones, 2007), US (Bass *et al.*, 2007), Cyprus (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006) and Malaysia (Jelas, 2000). Study in UK indicated that peer buddies of autistic children achieved a better understanding of autism and learnt about individual differences (Jones, 2007).

Interventions that engage SEN and non-SEN children to form positive peer relationships enable SEN and non-SEN children to share greater understandings among themselves. Most importantly, the interventions contribute to the development of an inclusive school ethos.

#### 2.2.4 Whole school approach to create an inclusive school ethos

### 2.2.3 Teachers' continuous efforts to cultivate inclusive values

Teachers play significant role in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. Social referencing theory argues that "one's perceptions and attitudes in a social setting are influenced by familiar and trusted person" (Bunch *et al.*, 2004: p.62).

SEN children tend to form friendships and be fully included in school social network if teachers emphasize the achievement of SEN children in activities valued by non-SEN peers (Fox *et al.*, 2004). On the contrary, if teachers rarely engage SEN and non-SEN children to work together in class activities, then SEN children tend to experience peer rejection as they are perceived by non-SEN peers as somewhat "different" and almost "not one of us" (Ibid: p.189).

Teachers can affect classroom social dynamics to promote positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children by encouraging co-operative learning, collaborative problem solving, and peer tutoring (Gibb *et al.*, 2007; Lindsay, 2007; Humphrey, Bartolo, Ale, Calleja, Hofsaess, Janikova, *et al.*, 2006).

Teachers can cultivate a climate of respect for all children by engaging SEN children in making class decisions, providing opportunities for them to participate in class activities and take up class responsibilities, and acknowledging the unique perspectives and contributions of SEN children to classroom community (Meadan, & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Mpofu, 2003).

In order to ensure successful inclusion of SEN children, there is a need for teachers to cultivate an inclusive classroom ethos where there are ample opportunities for all children regardless of their abilities to interact and develop friendships.

#### **2.2.4 Whole school approach to create an inclusive school ethos**

Inclusive practices need to be underpinned by inclusive policies and the creation of inclusive communities and cultures (Booth, Ainscow, & Kingston, 2006). Strategies to foster inclusion of SEN children are likely to be successful if they are underpinned by core values and attitudes of respecting and valuing diversity (Humphrey *et al.*, 2006).

Human behavior is influenced by the interactions of personal and environmental variables (Frederickson *et al.*, 2003) and consistent reciprocal interactions among behavioral, cognitive and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977). A child's individual skills and temperament, factors in the family and greater social environment affect the child's ability to engage positively with peers at different developmental stages (Hay *et al.*, 2004).

Research studies in UK (Fox *et al.*, 2004) and Canada (Bunch *et al.*, 2004) reveal that friendships among SEN and non-SEN children exist in schools where there are opportunities for SEN and non-SEN children to work together in all aspects of school life. School culture that encourages cooperative learning and understanding for all children promotes more positive attitudes and behavior toward SEN peers than school culture that emphasizes social comparison and competition on school-related tasks (McDougall, Dewit, King, Mille, & Steve, 2004).

Study in UK identified effective school management and inclusive school ethos as vital elements to ensure successful inclusion for ASD children (Gibb *et al.*, 2007). Another study engaging 35 primary teachers from seven countries across Europe revealed the need to perceive diversity as an enriching factor at the whole school level in order to promote inclusive education (Humphrey *et al.*, 2006).

The school's commitment to create an inclusive school ethos with active involvement of teachers and pupils is crucial in fostering friendships among SEN and non-SEN children. The values of inclusion and solidarity can bring all members of school community together to form a supportive social network in school to promote inclusion for all children.

## **2.3 *Creative arts and children's learning experiences***

Literature studies reveal that creative arts have been incorporated in interventions aiming to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs. The use of creative arts in children's learning experiences is grounded in the theories of social learning, reflective learning and emotional literacy.

### **2.3.1 Creative arts and social learning**

Social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1990) argue that learning involves social processes at many levels and social interaction is fundamental to the progression of learning.

Creative arts activities use social interactions to stimulate children's development and embrace the support of others which is consistent with the argument of social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1990) that children's development is attained through their interactions with others.

Collaborative learning theory asserts that collaboration can benefit all participants in a group learning situation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Creative arts activities in group setting involve collaborative work. Activities such as dramatic play provide ample opportunities for collaboration. Children learn to be responsible team players. They learn to share, take turns and negotiate with group members.



Situated learning theory argues that learning is situated in and mediated by context and culture (Lave & Wenger, 1990). Engaging in creative arts activities, children and adult facilitators bring with them diverse life experiences. They form a learning community where they learn about each other's cultural norms, values and belief (Catterall, 2007).

One of the most effective ways to deflate the authoritarian role of the teacher is engaging students in group work to give them the opportunity to share and learn from one another collectively (Giroux, & Penna, 1988). Creative arts activities in group encourage the development of an open, equal, flexible and reciprocal learning relationship. Group work allows children to practice participatory democracy and learn to appreciate reciprocity and differences.

### **2.3.2 Creative arts and reflective learning**

Constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 1966) argues that the interaction of new stimuli with pre-existing understandings enables learners to acquire new knowledge. According to constructivist learning theory, meta-cognition plays significant roles in learning process (Ibid). Meta-cognition involves reflective learning where participants actively reflect and monitor their learning and thinking processes (Ibid).

Creative arts activities engage children in reflective learning. Dramatic play for example requires children to invent character, reflect on the character and reinvent the character. Children engage actively in reflection and revision of ideas by planning how to enact the character, rehearsing, stepping out of the character and reflecting on the process.

Engaging in reflective learning through creative arts activities, children generate new understanding of the problems occurred in the learning process and improvise and create different strategies to solve the problems. Children engage in deep learning when they step back regularly to reflect and review on the learning progress.

Reflective learning helps children to gain deeper understanding of themselves and others. Reflecting on their thoughts, feelings and actions, children are more aware of their own emotions and behaviour and the effects of their emotions and behaviour on the learning process. Reflective learning enables children to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and transform their learning experiences into insights.

### **2.3.3 Creative arts and emotional literacy**

Emotional literacy refers to the ability to manage a full range of positive and negative emotions experienced by ourselves and others (Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1996). Emotional literacy enhances concentration, memory, problem solving and learning skills, creativity, innovation and leadership (Ibid). Emotional literacy is an important preventive strategy in promoting children's mental health (Coppock, 2007).

Children need to develop necessary emotional literacy in order to engage meaningfully with peer. Creative arts activities provide opportunities for children to develop necessary emotional literacy. Children learn to manage a full range of positive and negative emotions experienced by themselves and others in creative arts activities. They learn to accept and express these emotions constructively. The ability to identify and express one's own emotions and to read another's emotions correctly and comprehensively helps children negotiate multifaceted social web, engage meaningfully in relationships and reap the necessary social support crucial to healthy human development (Brouillette, 2010).

Creative arts such as dramatic play enable children to transform their life experiences in a safe and symbolic space (Cattanach, 1994). Creative arts is an effective medium for children to express themselves and have their voice heard. Children imagine, recreate images and ideas from their previous experiences through play (Vygotsky, 1978). Storytelling and dramatization allow children to express their ideas and feelings creatively.

Imagination is crucial in developing children's empathy. Imagination enhances empathetic understanding and enables children to feel the suffering of others although the intensity of suffering is different for every individual. Creative arts activities contribute to the development of empathetic understanding. A school-based intervention in US engaging ninety-five children indicated that role-playing was effective in cultivating participants' self-reported empathetic attitudes toward SEN peers (Beck, & Fritz-Verticchio, 2003).

By enacting roles in dramatic play, children identify with the suffering of the characters and learn to understand the complexity of the characters' inner world, their fears, their desires and their hopes. Children learn to feel the pain and the impact of the suffering on another person who is different from them.

Empathetic understanding facilitates the capacities of children to look at their world with a more complex and critical lens. By nurturing children's empathetic understanding, children develop the potential to become creative thinkers and problem-solvers with the capabilities to explore difficult issues in creative and innovative ways.

Education needs to play a proactive role to nurture the development of compassion, creativity, autonomy and the ability to take moral action (Davies, 2006). Empathetic understanding is crucial for the development of compassion. Compassion involves the ability to acknowledge one's own vulnerability to misfortune (Nussbaum, 1997). The ability to feel the pain of others and imagine that they might go through the same suffering enables children to form moral decisions towards creating an inclusive society.

### **3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a systematic overview of my research questions, theoretical framework, research methodology, sampling strategy, research process, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research questions**

This study aims to gain insights into the use of creative arts to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. A small scale, pilot creative arts intervention was implemented to a class of primary school children with the aim to create an inclusive classroom ethos of acceptance, respect and empathy. Participants engaged in storytelling and dramatic play named 'The Magic Drum' which aim to sensitize participants' empathetic understanding of people with diverse abilities and needs. The learning process emphasized collaborative creative work, empathy for others and cooperation.

The research questions are:

1. What are the learning experiences of participants in a creative arts intervention aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children?

The sub-questions are:

- How did participants feel being a person with disability?
- What do participants learn from participating in the project?
- Would participants interact differently with people with disability after participating in the project?
- What do participants like about the project?

- What do participants not like about the project?
2. What are the factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children?

### **3.2 Theoretical framework**

#### **3.2.1 Research paradigm**

A paradigm is the philosophical framework which attempts to explain the nature of truth and reality within a research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). This research is rooted in the paradigm of critical theory which attempts to facilitate community changes to promote social justice in a democratic society (Ibid). Critical theory is political and practical in its attempts to eradicate the illegitimate power and repression to realize an egalitarian society (Ibid).

Positivist paradigm assumes that there is an objective reality and strives for objectivity, measurability, predictability and control of behavior in its attempts to understand social phenomena (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Interpretive paradigm believes that reality is co-constructed through interactions and strives to capture the social actors' subjective understanding of the human world (Robson, 2002).

Positivist paradigm intends to describe an objective reality whereas interpretive paradigm aims to explain different perceptions of multiple and complex social constructed realities (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Contrary to positivistic and interpretive paradigms, critical theory not only seeks to understand multifaceted and subjective realities but strives to emancipate the disempowered to promote a just society (Ibid).

#### **3.2.2 Conceptual framework**

I adopt critical theory as my research paradigm as it is congruent with the aim of my study to facilitate changes in the school community. I am very concerned with the long term negative social and psychological consequences on SEN children due to peer



rejection, therefore I intend to develop a creative arts intervention model to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children in the hope to build an inclusive school community.

There are several criticisms against critical theory. Critical theory claims to empower participants through action research (Kemmis, 2009). Critics of critical theory argue that this might be over-optimistic as action researchers often have no control on the real locus of power and decision-making (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). This is especially true for Malaysian education system which is highly bureaucratic, hierarchical and authoritarian. Nevertheless, I believe that changes begin in small steps. Small changes in classroom community can create snowball effect in fostering an inclusive school ethos in the long run.

Critical theory has been criticized for its deliberate political agenda (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Critics argue that researchers should be ideologically neutral (Ibid). Critical theorists assert that 'neutral' researchers support the status quo of an oppressive society (Ibid). It is crucial for critical theorists to make explicit their political ideologies and agenda. In my study, I explained explicitly to the teachers and parents of participants the aim of my study to facilitate positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs through creative arts intervention (Appendix A, & B). In doing so, I had made explicit my political agenda to the teachers and parents of participants.

The choice of critical theory as the research paradigm is justified in the nature of this study to promote positive changes in the classroom community in the attempts to create an inclusive school environment for children with diverse abilities and needs.

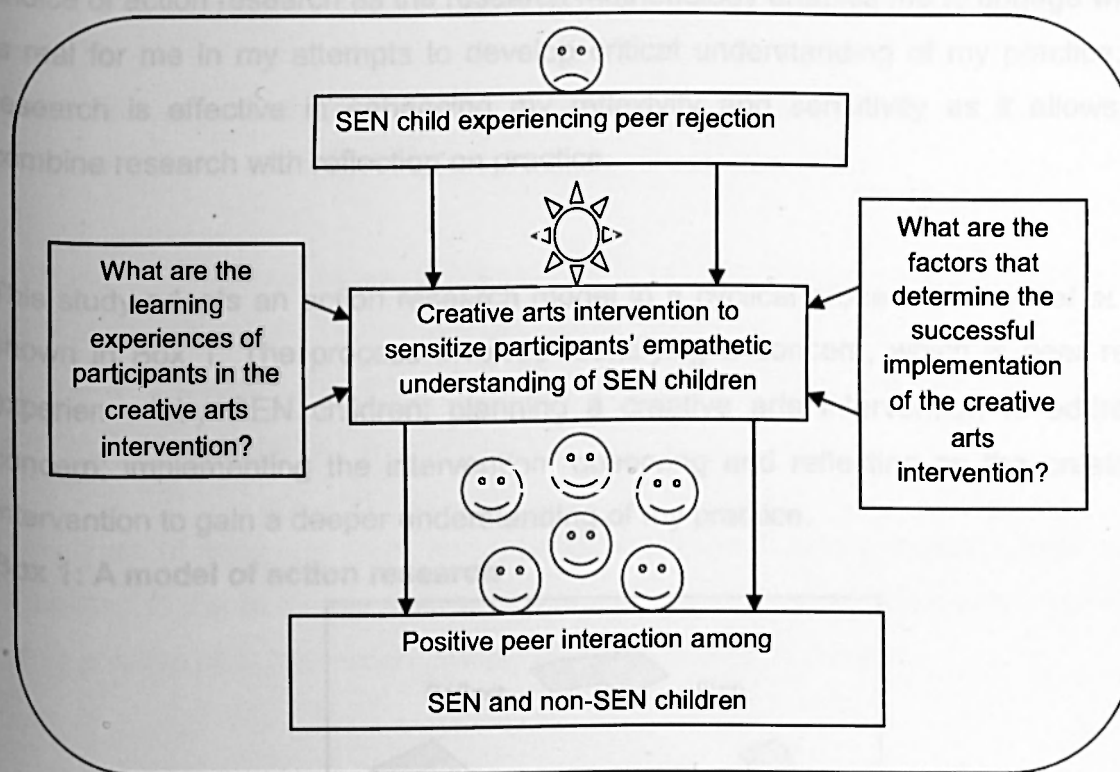
### **3.2.2 Conceptual framework**

Stigmatization and lack of awareness among non-SEN children towards their SEN peers tend to lead to peer rejection. This study used creative arts intervention to

emphasize the strengths of SEN children and foster empathetic understanding of non-SEN peers to support the difficulties encountered by SEN children.

The conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) shows that the focus of this study is to investigate the learning experiences of children participants in the creative arts intervention and the factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention.

**Figure 1** Conceptual framework for the creative arts intervention



### 3.3 Methodology

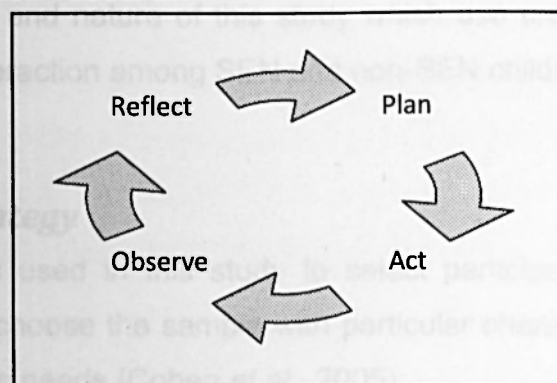
Based on the paradigm of critical theory, this study adopts an action research approach which aims to "liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer

world" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006: p.2). Action research begins with "a vision of social transformation and aspirations for greater social justice for all" (Somekh, 2006: p.7). The aim of this study to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children is in line with the aims of action research to strive for a sustainable ways of living in which people learn to "live an ethics, to relate better to others and to the world" (Kemmis, 2009: p. 8).

Action research does not intend to produce understanding that has universal truth. It is concerned about the action I can implement to instill my values in my practice. The choice of action research as the research methodology enables me to engage with what is real for me in my attempts to develop critical understanding of my practice. Action research is effective in enhancing my reflexivity and sensitivity as it allows me to combine research with reflection on practice.

This study adopts an action research model in a cyclical process (Cohen *et al.*, 2005) shown in Box 1. The process involved identifying a concern, which is peer rejection experienced by SEN children; planning a creative arts intervention to address the concern; implementing the intervention; observing and reflecting on the creative arts intervention to gain a deeper understanding of my practice.

**Box 1: A model of action research**



Research evidence indicates that the use of creative arts as research instruments for children appears logical and relevant, especially for SEN children (Griffiths, Berry, Holt, Naylor, & Weekes, 2006). Creative arts research instruments reduce the possibility of self censorship as creative arts activities invite spontaneous and genuine expression. This action research adopts creative arts research instruments such as storytelling, dramatic play, video recording and showcase to facilitate active engagement with participants.

In order to gain insight into the learning experiences of participants engaged in creative arts intervention, qualitative approach is adopted in this study to elicit the views of participants. Qualitative approach emerged as a dominant research methodology in the research of arts and drama (Fleming, Merrell, & Tymms, 2004). Compared to quantitative approach, qualitative approach is more equipped to investigate the process of arts and drama which is fluid, ambiguous and complex (Ibid).

Learning is an interactive social construct and truth is relative and contextually situated. Qualitative approach allows me to understand the different aspects of learning experiences through the eyes of participants by exploring the multiple and complex meanings co-constructed by participants.

The choice of action research and qualitative approach as the research methodologies is justified in the aims and nature of this study which use creative arts intervention to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

### **3.4 Sampling strategy**

Purposive sampling is used in this study to select participants. Purposive sampling allows researchers to choose the sample with particular characteristics and experience that meets their specific needs (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

In this study, a class with SEN and non-SEN children, with an issue of peer rejection is 'purposively' selected in order to implement the creative arts intervention. The number of participants is determined by the class size. A class of seventeen children aged ten in an international school was selected. The rationale to choose children in this age group is that they are more able to reflect on their learning experiences and communicate their insights compared to younger children in the primary level. Sixteen children participated in this study as one child was absent during the intervention session.

### **3.5 The research process**

In this study, the research process is as significant as the resultant findings. The research process consisted of three sessions which were introductory session, intervention session and closing session.

#### **3.5.1 Introductory session**

An introductory session was conducted with potential participants to seek their consent and build rapport with them. To ensure that the children understand the important aspects of the research related to their involvement, the aim of the study, the process involved, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to withdraw were explained clearly to them (Appendix D).

To enable the children to have a feel of the research process before they gave their consents, they were invited to participate in activities that resonant the activities in creative arts intervention. These activities included three games and a creative performance which emphasized cooperation and team work.

During the creative performance activity, children worked in a group of four people to create a vehicle. Children enacted disabled characters when they performed the



created vehicle to the big group. After the performance, children shared their thoughts and feelings on what they had learnt from the activities. They were invited to say something positive to the friend sitting on their left in the closure activity.

Children's consent was sought individually after the introductory session to avoid group pressure. All children gave verbal consent. The introductory session lasted about forty minutes.

### **3.5.2 Intervention session**

The intervention session was conducted two days after the introductory session. The intervention session consisted of greeting, narration of the story 'The Magic Drum', creation of a thick forest and rehearsal, performance of the journey to search for 'The Magic Drum', narration of the ending of the story 'The Magic Drum', debriefing, completing questionnaire, closing activity, and group interview. The intervention session lasted about two hours.

#### **Greeting**

The intervention session began with greeting and introducing the camera person to the participants. Participants were reminded that they would do some creative activities together and share their thoughts and feelings after the activities.

#### **Narration of the story 'The Magic Drum'**

'The Magic Drum' (Appendix B), a story which conveys positive messages of the struggle experienced by children with diverse abilities and needs was narrated to the participants. Participants were invited to role play children villagers with different abilities and needs searching for the magic drum.

Participants formed two groups with four girls and four boys in each group. Each participant chose to enact a disabled character with strengths. The strengths included very helpful and caring, good at skating, swimming, acting, singing, mathematic, playing basketball and playing guitar. The disabilities were blindness, mute or physical impairment with only one hand that could move.

### **Creation of a thick forest and rehearsal**

Participants transformed the classroom into a thick forest. One group created a narrow cave whereas another group created a big rock using tables and chairs. After that, participants used cloths to blind fold their eyes or tie their hands to disable themselves. Each group practiced how they would crawl in the narrow cave and climb on the big rock to reach the magic drum. Each group decided what would happen when they hit the magic drum together at the same time and how the story ended.

### **Performance of the journey to search for 'The Magic Drum'**

After several rehearsals, each group took turn to perform their journey to search for the magic drum. When one group performed, the other group was the audience. Participants were reminded to work as a team to help each other manage the challenges they face in their journey to search for the magic drum.

### **Narration of the ending of the story 'The Magic Drum'**

After the performance, the ending of the story of 'The Magic Drum' was narrated to the participants as shown below:

'After going through all the challenges, the children from the village found the magic drum in the forest. They made a circle and hit the magic drum together at the same time. And what happened? (Paused) They created wonderful music.'

Their difficulties and disabilities did not disappear. But the children realized that everybody has his or her own strengths and difficulties. The children realized that by working together as a team, helping each other, they can manage a lot of challenges in life. And these children become very good friends forever. The end."

### **Debriefing**

Participants were invited to come out of their characters by shaking their bodies. They were reminded that they were not the children villagers in the far away country and they were back to their own self.

### **Completing questionnaire**

Participants were invited to reflect on their learning experiences by responding to seven open-ended questions in the questionnaire after debriefing.

### **Closing round**

After all the participants have handed in the questionnaires, they were invited to sit in a circle to do a closing round. Everybody was invited to take turn to share what they would like to say. They were reminded that it was ok to say pass if they felt they have nothing to say. After the closing round, participants turned the room back into the classroom.

### **Group interview**

After participants took their seats, they were invited to participate in the group interview to express their views on five questions drawn from the questionnaire.

### **3.5.3 Closing session**

The closing session was conducted five days after the intervention session to round up. It lasted about forty minutes. The first activity was 'The positive things about me'. The activity began with a participant telling the group his or her own strengths, followed by the group members telling the group the strengths they observed in that particular participant. Everybody took turn to participate in this activity. After that, the video recording of 'The Magic Drum' lasted about thirty minutes was presented to the participants on the LCD screen.

## **3.6 Methods of data collection**

In line with critical theory paradigm, action research and qualitative research methodologies, this study applied multi-method approach in data collection. The open ended questionnaire, group interview, video recording and reflective diary presented concrete and visual data. The multi-method approach allowed me to obtain in-depth data to answer the research questions. Due to the limitation of time, accessibility and resources, this study did not implement pre-test and post-test procedure to evaluate the outcomes of the creative arts intervention.

### **3.6.1 Open-ended questions on questionnaire**

Questionnaire is an effective method of data collection within a short period of time as it is less time consuming compared to face-to-face interviews. Due to time constraints, I was unable to conduct individual or focus group interviews with sixteen participants. Questionnaires with open-ended questions enabled participants to communicate their unique ways of experiencing the learning process in a structured method. Sixteen questionnaires were collected for data analysis.

The following questions were listed in the questionnaire to elicit participants' views on the learning process:

1. How did you feel being a person with disability?

2. What do you learn from participating in the project?
3. Would you interact differently with people with disability after participating in the project? Please explain.
4. What can you do to create a better environment for people with disability?
5. What do you like about the project?
6. What do you not like about the project?
7. Would you like to participate again in future? Please explain.

### **3.6.2 Semi-structured group interview**

Group interview can generate a wider range of responses compared to individual interviews (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Group interview was adopted in this study to encourage participants to challenge and expand each other's ideas and introduce new ideas into the discussion. Group interview allowed me to gain descriptive and in-depth data concerning the values, perceptions and experiences of participants related to their learning experiences in the creative arts intervention. Group interview offered some triangulation to the data collected from questionnaires and allowed exploration of areas arising from the questionnaires.

Semi-structured group interview with sixteen participants was conducted after they filled in the questionnaires. The group interview which lasted twelve minutes was video recorded. The following questions were asked during semi-structured group interview:

1. How did you feel being a person with disability?
2. What do you learn from participating in the project?
3. What can you do to create a better place for people with disability?



4. What do you like about the project?

5. What are the things that you may not like and you want to change? Is that anything that you think we can do differently?

### **3.6.3 Video recording**

Video recording provides richer data for analysis as it is able to capture the complex feelings and behaviour expressed through non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and body gesture.

The video recording captured the process in the intervention session involving the creation of the forest, rehearsal and the enactment of the journey to search for the magic drum, closing round and the group interview. The recording attempted to give equal attention to participants and capture the collaborative creative work demonstrated by the participants. Due to technical problem, the video recording did not capture the whole two hours session but one hour of different sections of intervention session.

### **3.6.4 Reflective diary**

The use of reflective diary is one of the effective methods to promote reflexivity which is a key principle of action research (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). My reflective diary captured my personal insights on the research process with an emphasis on the factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention.

## **3.7 Data analysis**

Data collected from questionnaires, group interview, video recording and reflective diary was coded and analyzed systematically to search for emerging themes. Codes and themes in the data analysis were categorized according to two research questions. After the main themes had been identified, all the data was sampled against the main themes to verify whether they confirmed or disconfirmed the category. Any data that does not

conform to the main themes such as negative cases were given equal attention for data analysis as they provide valuable insights to answer the research questions.

### **3.8 Validity and reliability**

The concepts of validity and reliability are multifaceted and the issues of validity and reliability are addressed differently in quantitative and qualitative/naturalistic research (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

The original definitions of validity and reliability reflect the influence of positivist paradigm and quantitative research methodology. Validity in quantitative research is concerned with accuracy. A quantitative research is valid if the findings accurately describe the phenomena being researched (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). The need to replace positivist notions of validity with the notion of authenticity in qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992, Guba, & Lincoln, 1989, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005) has been an ongoing debate.

Reliability in quantitative research is concerned with "consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents" (Cohen *et al.*, 2005: p.117). A quantitative research is reliable if it demonstrates that similar findings would be found if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (Ibid).

Reliability in qualitative research is concerned with the degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1992, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005). A qualitative research is reliable if there is a match between the data recorded and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched (Ibid).

Validity and reliability in qualitative research might be addressed through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checking, reflexivity and independent audits (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

In order to increase the validity and reliability of this study, several strategies had been adopted, including appropriate selection of research paradigm, methodology, sample and research instruments; methodological triangulation; reflexivity; peer debriefing and negative case analysis.

### **3.8.1 Appropriate selection of research paradigm, methodology, sample and research instruments**

To increase the validity and reliability, this study selected appropriate research paradigm and methodology to answer the research questions. Appropriate sample and research instruments were used for data collection.

### **3.8.2 Methodological triangulation**

Exclusive reliance on one research method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular phenomena being researched (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Methodological triangulation was adopted in this study through the use of questionnaire, group interview, video recording and reflective diary to collect data. Validity and reliability of this study were increased when different methods of data collection yielded substantially similar findings.

To increase the validity and reliability in questionnaire, several strategies had been applied. Open-ended questions were designed to invite honest and personal comment from participants. Open-ended question can capture the authenticity, richness and depth of response (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Open-ended questions enabled participants to response freely in their own terms without the limitations of pre-set categories of response (Ibid).

Simple wording were used to match the understanding levels of the participants. Each question asked only one thing. The images of a magic drum and a child with puppet were inserted in the questionnaire (Appendix E) to make it look attractive. To increase

the response rate, all participants were requested to fill in the questionnaire immediately after their participation in the creative arts intervention. Sufficient time was given to them and the researcher was around to clarify any doubts or uncertainties related to the questionnaire.

In order to address the issue of children telling the researchers what they thought the researcher wanted to know, and to encourage greater honesty and genuine responses, participants were reminded not to write their names and not to worry about spelling or grammar as it was not a test. To avoid peer influence, participants were requested to fill in the questionnaire by themselves quietly.

Group interview provides a framework for discussion, clarification and interpretation. Group interview was adopted in this study as it is less intimidating for children compared to individual interviews (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Several strategies had been applied to increase the validity and reliability in group interview. Questions with simple wording were asked to match the comprehensive levels of the participants.

Interviewing children is a joint effort of meaning-making between researchers and children. Greig and Taylor (1999) stress the importance of building a trusting relationship with children when interviewing them. Hill (2005) reminds researchers to adopt an interpersonal style that minimizes the authority image of adult researchers. The introductory session and intervention session using creative arts activities enabled me to build rapport with participants before the group interview was conducted at participants' classroom. The familiar setting, the company of peers and the established rapport tend to reduce participants' anxiety.

There are several criticisms against methodological triangulation. Silverman (1985, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005) criticizes that methodological triangulation is grounded in positivist paradigm as it assumes that multi-method data collection is superior to single-

method data collection. Denzin (1997, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005) argues that "the assumption that a single unit can always be measured more than once violates the interactionist principles of emergence, fluidity, uniqueness and specificity" (p.115). Fielding and Fielding (1986, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005) argue that "methodological triangulation does not necessarily increase validity, reduce bias or bring objectivity to research" (p.115).

Richardson (1998, cited in Foster, 2007) proposes to replace the concept of triangulation with the metaphor of crystal as there are more than three sides to approach the world. "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions" (p.363). The metaphor of crystal resonant with this study as it captures the unique and complexity of children's learning experiences in creative arts intervention.

### **3.8.3 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a complex process involving constant reflection on researcher's own preconceptions, values and beliefs and the implications of this value system on the research (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Action research believes that researcher must be involved in order to gain a deeper understanding of human world. It acknowledges the mutual influence between researchers and participants in the research process. In this study, I engaged in reflexivity to reduce researcher bias.

### **3.8.4 Peer debriefing**

Peer debriefing reduces researcher bias (Robson, 2002) by providing critical comments to researcher. A disinterested Erasmus Mundus colleague whose research focus was different from mine was my critical friend. She provided very constructive and practical comments on various aspects of my research. She was also the camera person of this study.



### **3.8.5 Negative case analysis**

Negative case analysis helps in reducing researcher bias (Robson, 2002). This study adopted negative case analysis by presenting data that did not conform to the main themes to gain insights into the complexity of children's learning experiences in creative arts intervention.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

This study followed the ethical guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the three partner Universities of the Erasmus Mundus MA SEN programme.

An introductory meeting was conducted with the SENCO, drama teacher and head teacher of the participatory school to discuss my research proposal. After consent was granted from the participatory school, a participant information statement (Appendix A, & B) explaining my background and the research, and the consent form (Appendix C) were sent out via the school to the parents of potential participants.

Parents were assured that their children's participation in this research is completely voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Parents were encouraged to communicate directly with me any concerns related to the research. Parents were assured that the well being of their children is the paramount consideration in the attempts to resolve any ethical issues arising during the research. Parents were informed that they can voice their concerns or complaints about the conduct of the research to the Head of participatory school.

I also offered to send an electronic copy of my findings (in English) to the parents upon completion of my research. Thirteen parents gave written informed consent whereas three parents gave verbal informed consent to the head teacher.

Hill (2005) proposes that child participants should make informed choices about agreeing or refusing to take part in a research; opting out at any stage; determining the boundaries of public, network, and third-party confidentiality; and contributing ideas to research agendas and processes.

In this study, an introductory session was conducted with potential participants to explain the research more fully, to ensure that the children were happy to participate in the research. The session was conducted in an interactive manner where children were encouraged to voice their views and ask questions.

To ensure that the children understand the important aspects of the research related to their involvement, children were given simple explanation that matches their level of understanding. For example, the aim of the study was explained as "My project is about supporting children including children with disabilities to have friends in school" (Appendix D). Confidentiality and anonymity were elaborated as "When I write my project report, I will not write your name and your personal information. People who read my project report will not know what you have shared in the group" (Ibid).

Children were assured that they have the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The activities in introductory session resonant with the activities in creative arts intervention to allow children to have a feel of the research process before they gave their consents. Children's consent was sought individually after the introductory session to avoid group pressure. All children gave verbal consent.

I was cautious not to open the wound or distressing memories of the participants throughout the research process. I respected participants' right to act on their own free will, therefore I was cautious not to coerce participants into participating in the activities, completing the questionnaire or responding to group interview.

Interview, video recording and reflective diary to answer two research questions. The first section describes the background information of research participants. The second section presents the key themes that emerged from the exploration of participants' views on the learning process in the creative arts intervention. The third section elaborates the findings on the important factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

#### *4.1 Background information of children participants*

The research school is an international school based on the English National Curriculum in Prague with students from both the local and international communities. The participants are sixteen children, eight boys and eight girls, aged ten to eleven from the same class. Majority of these children has been in the same class for five years. Five new comers join the class since September 2009. The participants are from different nationalities, including Czech/Indian, Czech/Chinese, Czech/Israeli, Spanish/British, Italian, French, Danish, Russian, Afghan, British and South African.

Three children are diagnosed by educational psychologist as having special educational needs. According to the SENCO, one child is diagnosed with dyslexia, another child with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and another child with semantic pragmatic disorder. These children receive learning support from SENCO twice a week for literacy and mathematics subjects. The sessions consist of one individual session and one group session for three of them. Each session lasts for an hour. Two SEN children who are diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD also receive learning support in the class from teacher assistant for four hours a week.

## **4 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the key themes that emerged from the questionnaires, group interview, video recording and reflective diary to answer two research questions. The first section describes the background information of research participants. The second section presents the key themes that emerged from the exploration of participants' views on the learning process in the creative arts intervention. The third section elaborates the findings on the important factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

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Two SEN children are native English speakers whereas for one of them, English is a second language. Two SEN children have just joined the class since September 2009. Two SEN children join after school clubs and sports whereas one SEN child does not join any after school activities.

Interviews with the head teacher, drama teacher and SENCO reveal that the child with semantic pragmatic disorder seems to experience peer rejection. The child is native English speaker and has been in the same class for four years. The child joins after school activities and has friends who are much younger. According to the teachers, the child appears sensitive, withdrawn and gets frustrated easily. The child usually plays alone and does not socialize with classroom peers during play time. The child does not receive any psycho-social program or counseling program.

My observation during introductory session, intervention session and closing session was consistent with teachers' reports regarding the issue of peer rejection. For example, during introductory session, the child did not join her group during group activity. During closing session, the child appeared sensitive and angry when her peer described one of her strengths as 'funny' during the activity 'The positive things about me'.

#### **4.2 *What are the learning experiences of participants in the creative arts intervention aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children?***

In order to understand the different aspects of participants' learning experiences in the creative arts intervention, data analysis was conducted on the questionnaires (Appendix F), group interview (Appendix G) and video recording of closing round activity (Appendix H) to elicit the views of participants. The focus of data analysis was on description and interpretation of participants' perspectives which led to an understanding of what was happening in participants' world. The findings of data analysis are organized and presented according to the sub-questions of research question one.



Data analysis showed that some participants especially participants who are not native English speakers had used Czech words or made some spelling mistakes in the questionnaires. The words in bracket showed the 'correct' words interpreted by researcher. The gender of the participants was indicated as G or B in the bracket at the end of the comments made by participants, for example, (AG) indicated that the participant is a girl whereas (CB) indicated that the participant is a boy.

#### **4.2.1 How did participants feel being a person with disability?**

Majority of the participants associated their experience of being a disabled person with negative feelings whereas a small number of the participants associated their experience of being a disabled person with positive feelings.

##### **Negative feelings**

Data analysis on sixteen questionnaires indicated that twelve participants associated their experience of being a disabled person with negative feelings such as different, hard, weird, bad, strange and sad:

- Not really (really) good (P1).
- Different and I realized it is hard to have disability (P2).
- It wasn't the best feeling and it was hard (P3).
- It felt hard (P4).
- I felt really weird and like I shouldn't be in this world (P5).
- I felt (felt) different (P6).
- Different (P7).
- I felt bad because you cannot sometimes do things (P8).
- I felt bad because I couldn't (couldn't) move my hands (P9).
- I feel sad for them and there (they) are not lucky (P10).
- A little strange but it was ok (P11).

- I felt good on the start but I know that if I had the disability forever that won't be nice (P12).

Eight participants' views elicited through group interview were consistent with the findings of questionnaires. They associated their experience of being a disabled person with negative feelings such as sad, different and hard:

- Sad for people who have problems (AG).
- Different and a bit hard to go through ... (BG)
- It was hard (DB).
- It was hard when we like, it was really hard when you have like disability (JB).

Of the eight participants, four boys elaborated that they felt good or fun as disabled characters but they did not want to be disabled for the rest of their lives. This implied that they understood how hard it was being a disabled person while enjoying the fun of dramatic play:

- When I was being blind, I felt good but if I will be blind forever then it won't be nice (CB).
- I felt good when I was blind but I really didn't, I really don't want to be blind (GB).
- It was fun having my hands tied (cross both hands as if tied) but I don't want to be like that for the rest of my lives (HB).
- It was fun, play but not for all of my life (IB).

### **Positive feelings**

Data analysis on sixteen questionnaires indicated that four participants associated their experience of being a disabled person with positive feelings such as great, good, fun and very happy.

Two participants did not explain why they felt positive when acting as disabled person. My observation suggested that the participants enjoyed the fun of dramatic play thus related the experience of being a disabled person with positive feelings:

- I think it is fun (P15).
- Very happy (P16).

Two participants explained in the questionnaires that they felt good because other people were helping them:

- I felt great with all the other people helping me and I liked helping them (P13).
- I felt good because it is good when somebody was helping you (P14).

During group interview, two participants also expressed that they felt positive being a disabled person due to the helping process:

- I felt ok when I helped other people and the other people helped me (EG).
- Hm... I felt normal and better when like people were helping me when I couldn't like slide, with one hand like when I was trying my best, when people was pushing my feet or people trying to pull me out (FB).

#### **4.2.2 What do participants learn from participating in the project?**

All sixteen participants except one identified specific ways in which they felt they had learnt from participating in the project. The participants reported learning about team work, helping, friendship and creating things. Participants realized that disabled people were good at something, that it was hard to be disabled, and one must be gentle with disabled people. One participant realized that he had a disability when using chopsticks.

### Team work

Six participants reflected in the questionnaires that they learnt about team work:

- Teamwork, fun and creating things (P2).
- Teamwork, friendliness (P3).
- Teamwork (P4).
- You have to work as a team to achieve something if you have a disability (P6).
- I learned team work in this project (P8).
- I learned team work from tis (this) project (P14).

### Helping

Five participants noted in the questionnaires that they learnt about helping others. One participant felt positive about helping others whereas another participant felt negative about helping others:

- That helping can be full of fun and friendship (P5).
- I (lurnd) learn that I should help people (P9).
- I learn that it is hard to help others (P10).
- That you always have to help each other (P11).
- Helping others (P15).

Group interview enabled two participants to elaborate on what they learnt about helping disabled people:

- I felt that people with disability are not feeling normal, so we try to be like them, so we know now how to help them to overcome it (LG).
- Er... like people with disability need like, extra help, when you see them, you should really like, try to help them in the best way possible, because like, if blind people, if they are like, shopping or delicate things, you should like, show them the way so that they don't get into trouble ... Tell him show him, like hold his hands, like say go here, go there (FB).

### **Friendship**

Two participants stated in the questionnaires that they learnt about friendship:

- Teamwork, friendliness (P3).
- That helping can be full of fun and friendship (P5).

### **Creating things**

One participant noted in the questionnaire that he or she learnt to create things (P2).

### **Disabled people were good at something**

Two participants explained in the questionnaires that they realized that disabled people were good at something:

- It doesn't matter (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something (P1).
- That it doesn't matter if a person has a disability because everybody is good at (at) something (P13).

One girl elaborated in the group interview that "When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths" (EG).

### **Life was hard for disabled people**

Two participants indicated in the questionnaires that they learnt that life was hard for disabled people:

- I learnt (learn) how hard it is to have something wrong with you (P7).
- That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people (P12).

During group interview, two participants explained that they realized that life was hard for disabled people:

- Er.. I learn that it is hard for the people with disabilities, that it is hard like move thing ... (HB).



- We learn how life is like when you can't do things ... sometimes it just feels bad (BG).

### **One must be gentle with disabled people**

One participant indicated in the questionnaire that he realized that "That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people" (P12).

### **I had disability**

During group interview, one boy expressed that he realized that he too had disability:

- I have disability, when eating like using chopsticks (CB).

### **Not sure**

One participant (P16) indicated in the questionnaire that he or she was not sure about what he or she learnt.

## **4.2.3 Would participants interact differently with people with disability after participating in the project?**

Data analysis on sixteen questionnaires showed that five participants reported that they would interact differently with disabled people after participating in this project. Three participants stated that their interaction with disabled people remained the same after participating in this project. Five participants elaborated that they would help disabled people without indicating whether there were changes in their interaction with disabled people after participating in this project.

### **Yes, participants knew how it felt to be disabled**

Of the sixteen participants, five explained in the questionnaires that they would interact differently with disabled people after participating in this project as they knew how it felt to be disabled. Two participants elaborated that they would help disabled people:

- Yes because now I know what it feels (P3).

- Yes because I know now how hard it is for them (P4).
- Yes I would because (because) I would know how they feel. So Surely I would Help them =-) (P5).
- Yes because now I know how hard it is for them, and I will help them (P7).
- Yes because I know it is hard (P15).

### **No**

Three participants illustrated in the questionnaires that their interaction with disabled people remained the same after participating in this project. One participant asserted that "It is mean to be to be staring or laughing at people with disabilities". This implied that his or her attitude of 'not being mean' towards disabled people remained the same:

- No I wouldn't help him because I don't know him (P1).
- I would do the same as I was doing before: being sorry for him and hoping I won't have a disability (P12).
- No because it is mean to be to be staring or laughing on (at) people with disabilities (P13).

### **Help them**

Five participants stated in the questionnaires that they would help disabled people without indicating whether there were changes in their interaction with disabled people after participating in this project:

- I would behaved (behave) by helping that person (P6).
- I would help the person (P9).
- Help them (P10).
- help them (P11).
- I would help him because he would need help from somebody for example if somebody was blind or couldn't walk or couldn't talk! (P14).

#### **Not sure or did not respond**

Two participants (P2, & P16) noted in the questionnaires that they were not sure whether there were changes in their interaction with disabled people after participating in this project. One participant (P8) did not respond to this question in the questionnaire.

#### **4.2.4 What do participants like about the project?**

All sixteen participants reported that they enjoyed their participation in the creative arts intervention. The participants offered a range of positive comments about what they particularly liked about the experience. Their comments included acting to be disabled, being creative, going through the adventure, having fun, working as a team, helping, learning more about disabled people, the magic drum and everything.

#### **Acting to be disabled**

Four participants noted in the questionnaires that they liked acting to be disabled:

- Learning how it is to be disabled (P2).
- I liked being blind and the obstacles (obstacles) (P4).
- It was fun because we were acting (P9).
- It was fun being blind (P11).

Video analysis on closing round activity showed that two participants enjoyed enacting the disabled characters:

- I enjoy being without eyes (GB).
- I enjoy building the rock and being blind (KG).

#### **Being creative**

Three participants explained in the questionnaires that they liked the creative elements:

- Creative and fun (P1).
- Part that you had to create a certain thing (P3).
- That we got to be creative and helpful (P5).

Video analysis on closing round activity revealed that five participants enjoyed being creative:

- I enjoy when we were building the rock, er... the cave (HB).
- I enjoy the part where we have to build the ... (FB).
- I enjoy building the cave (JB).
- I enjoy building the rock and being blind (KG).
- Going through the cave and making the rock (OG).

### **Going through the adventure**

Three participants stated in the questionnaires that they liked the adventure:

- I liked being blind a (and) the obstacles (obstacles) (P4).
- To go have adventures (adventure) (P10).
- The adventure I had (P12).

During closing round activity, two participants expressed that they enjoyed the adventure:

- I enjoy the adventure (CB).
- Going through the cave and making the rock (OG).

### **Having fun**

Eight participants indicated in the questionnaires that they would like to participate again in future because it was fun:

- Yes because it was fun (P2, P4, P7, & P8).
- Yes I would in future participate because it would be a great fun (P5).
- Yes it was great fun (P6).
- It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would like (like) to do it again (P9).
- Yes! It's fun! (P13).

Seven participants responded in group interview that they enjoyed the fun. The identities of two participants could not be identified as the video recording captured the voices without identifying the speakers:

- It was fun and felt like helpful (LG).
- It was fun when we work as a team (AG).
- It was fun (DB, MG, FB, & two participants whose identities could not be identified).

### **Working as a team**

Two participants stated in the questionnaires that they liked working as a team:

- That we worked like a team (P6).
- I like working as a team (P13).

One participants noted in the questionnaire that he or she would like to participate again in future because "It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would lik (like) to do it again" (P9).

During group interview, two participants expressed that they enjoyed team work:

- Working as a team (EG).
- It was fun when we work as a team (AG).

### **Helping**

Two participants indicated in the questionnaires and one participant expressed during group interview that they liked the process and idea of helping:

- That we got to be creative and helpful (P5).
- I like that you whont (want) to help disabled children (P7).
- It was fun and felt like helpful (LG).

During closing round activity, one participant reported that "... I enjoy the part where we have to help like people who couldn't see or people who needed help" (FB).



### **Learning more about disabled people**

One participant reported in the questionnaire that he or she would like to participate again in future to learn more about disabled people:

- Yes I would because I'd like to learn more about them (P3).

### **The magic drum**

One participant stated in the questionnaire that he or she liked the magic drum (P16).

### **Everything**

Three participants (P8, P14, & P15) noted in the questionnaires that they liked everything. Two participants whose identities could not be identified expressed that they enjoyed everything during group interview. During closing round activity, three participants expressed that they enjoyed everything:

- I enjoy everything (EG, & NG).
- I enjoy all of it and I feel it is hard for disabled people (DB).

### **4.2.5 What do participants not like about the project?**

Of sixteen participants, twelve indicated in the questionnaires that there was nothing that they did not like about the project. Two participants pointed out specific elements that they did not like about the project. During group interview, two participants gave individual suggestions to conduct the creative arts intervention differently.

### **The group went last to perform**

One participant explained in the questionnaire that he or she does not like "That we went last" (P2) in the performance.

### **Could not share ideas when being mute**

One participant elaborated in the questionnaire that "I don't think I didn't like something about the project only one thing being mute you can't share your ideas" (P5).

### **Suggestion to enact deaf character**

During group interview, one girl suggested to enact deaf character when the group discussed question one:

- Why didn't we do like, like people who cannot hear ... like putting ... (hands block her ears) in the ear (KG).

### **Suggestion to take precaution to create a safer place for the blind**

During group interview, one girl suggested to take precaution to create a safer place for the blind:

- May be more safer for the blind one because if I don't know if other people like they say like go here (tap the table), and then they might not hear it well, and then they ... (both hands wide open) (EG).

### **Nothing**

Twelve participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, & P15) indicated in the questionnaires and three participants (KG, & two participants whose identities could not be identified) responded in the group interview that there was nothing that they did not like about the project.

### **Not sure**

Two participants stated in the questionnaires that he or she did not know (P9) or not sure (P16) about what he or she did not like about the project.

## **4.3 *What are the factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children?***

Data analysis on open ended questionnaires, group interview, video recording and reflective diary (Appendix I) identified four factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. The four important factors are appropriate matching

of the intervention to meet the specific needs of participants, active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants, reflexivity of researcher and collaboration with school teachers.

#### **4.3.1 Appropriate matching of the intervention to meet the specific needs of participants**

Data analysis showed that by meeting the specific needs of participants, the creative arts intervention successfully engaged participants in co-operative and collaborative creative work which enhanced their development of empathetic understanding of disabled people. Participants' comments reflected that they understood how it felt to be disabled:

- Different and I realized it is hard to have disability (P2).
- It felt hard (P4).
- I felt really weird and like I shouldn't be in this world (P5).
- I felt (felt) different (P6).

In order to cultivate participants' empathetic understanding of their SEN peers, the story of the magic drum incorporated the learning difficulties encountered by three SEN participants. The children in the story encountered difficulties with spelling or mathematic or hyperactivity which resembled the difficulties experienced by participants with dyslexia, semantic pragmatic disorder and ADHD. In addition, the strengths of the disabled characters were emphasized. The disabled characters were very helpful and caring. They were also good at skating, swimming, acting, singing, mathematic, playing basketball, and playing guitar.

The meeting with school teachers and the introductory session functioned as assessment sessions for me to get a clearer picture of the different abilities and needs presented by the participants. I allocated sufficient energy for pre-session preparation and post-session reflection in order to implement the creative arts intervention that met

the specific needs of participants. I prepared extra activities for introductory session. Participants engaged in two extra activities as there was some spare time in introductory session.

In order to observe participants' responses to creative arts activities during introductory session, I incorporated activities that resonant the activities in intervention session. I noticed that participants enjoyed working as a team, creating something together and enacting the roles of disabled people. They were responsive and interactive when asked what they learnt from the activity. The observation in introductory session enabled me to incorporate creative arts activities that appealed to participants in intervention session.

In addition, the introductory session enabled me to observe participants' peer interaction. I noticed that boys and girls naturally formed same gender groups. Therefore, I requested the participants to form two mixed gender groups with four boys and four girls in each group during intervention session.

As majority of participants are not native English speakers, I used simple English to communicate with participants. Simple wording were used in the narration of the story, questionnaire and group interview to match the English levels of participants. I applied demonstration and modeling when giving instructions. I also used encouragement, affirmation and praise when interacting with participants.

In order to meet the specific need of participants, the design of creative arts intervention had taken into consideration the learning difficulties experienced by three SEN Participants, peer interaction among participants, the emphasis on the strengths of the disabled characters, creative arts activities that appealed to participants and the English levels of participants.

#### 4.3.2 Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants

Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants enabled participants to respond more actively and deeply in the learning process to test out their own thoughts and feelings about disabled people. Participants' comments showed that they understood the possible limitations and frustrations experienced by disabled people:

- I felt bad because you cannot sometimes do things (P8).
- I felt bad because I couldent (couldn't) move my hands (P9).
- It was hard when we like, it was really hard when you have like disability (JB).
- Er.. I learn that it is hard for the people with disabilities, that it is hard like move thing ... (HB).
- We learn how life is like when you can't do things ... sometimes it just feel bad (BG).

Creative arts activities such as storytelling, dramatic play and showcase were adopted to facilitate active engagement with participants in three sessions. These sessions increased opportunities for SEN and non-SEN participants to engage actively in co-operative and collaborative creative work. Active engagement enabled participants to feel a stronger sense of commitment to the process of learning. Participants planned and assigned different roles and responsibilities among themselves.

Video analysis showed that SEN and non-SEN participants formed a line and stayed in close proximity to help each other climb the big rock and crawl in the narrow cave. The 'physically disabled' participants were responsible to give verbal instructions to the 'blind' participants whereas the 'mute' participants were responsible to guide the 'blind' participants. The 'mute' participants also assisted the 'physically disabled' participants by pushing or pulling the 'physically disabled' participants when they went through the narrow cave.



Moreover, data analysis from reflective diary revealed that all participants appeared to enjoy the showcase. Participants laughed and talked when they watched themselves appearing on the LCD screen. They also requested to watch all the segments of the video recording.

Creative arts activities encouraged participants to be autonomous, energetic and imaginative. Video analysis revealed that participants were enthusiastic to enact different disabled characters and they asked my permission to change their disabled characters. I encouraged them to negotiate among themselves. Some participants managed to exchange their disabled characters with their friends. Video analysis showed that some participants climbed the big rock and crawled in the narrow cave in different disabled characters. Indirectly, this has enriched their experiences in the learning process.

The findings of this study indicate that active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants contributes to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

#### **4.3.3 Reflexivity of researcher**

Data analysis indicated that I constantly engaged in reflexivity which is vital to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

During introductory session, I noticed that one of the SEN participants, Ann (Pseudonym) was sitting on a chair outside of her group when her group was sitting on the floor discussing how to create the vehicle. I engaged in reflection-in-action to decide whether to intervene. Although I was cautious not to coerce participants into participating in the activities, I decided to invite Ann to join her group in my attempts to

facilitate positive peer relationship between herself and her peers. I decided to respect her right to act on her own free will if she chose not to participate after my invitation. When I invited Ann to join her group, she complained about a group member. One of her group members immediately invited Ann to join them and she joined the group.

During intervention session, I noticed that Ann was crying when her group was busy discussing how to create a big rock. Reflection-in-action enabled me to be aware of my anxiety. I tried to relax by doing deep breathing before I approached Ann. I asked Ann gently what happened. Ann showed me one of her fingers with a plaster and said a boy hurt her finger when he held her hands. The boy looked uneasy and explained that it was an accident. I reflected that Ann felt the pain when the boy accidentally held her injured finger. Ann said the boy did it on purpose and it was not the first time. The boy denied. I engaged in reflection-in-action and decided to take care of both Ann's feelings and the boy's feelings in my attempts to resolve the conflict. I empathized with Ann by reflecting that her injured finger must have made her felt very painful. Ann nodded. I then explained that it was an accident and suggested that the boy apologized to Ann. The boy apologized and Ann accepted his apology. Ann then joined her group to create the big rock.

Reflection-in-action enabled me to understand that flexibility, adaptability and sensitivity are vital when working with participants of different abilities and needs. When participants were filling in the questionnaires, about three participants asked me to explain question three in the questionnaire. Reflection-in-action made me realize that some participants may have difficulties understanding question three but felt shy to ask, I decided to explain question three to the whole group by giving an example.

After watching the video recording and reading the questionnaires, I engaged in reflection-on-action and realized that the creative arts intervention over-emphasized the

difficulties experienced by disabled people. Majority of participants did not seem to get the message that everybody has strengths and difficulties or disabilities. Only a few participants realized that:

- It doesn't matter (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something (P1).
- That it doesn't matter if a person has a disability because everybody is good at something (P13).
- When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths (EG).
- I have disability, when eating like using chopsticks (CB).

In order to emphasize that 'Everybody has his or her own strengths and difficulties', I incorporated the activity 'The positive things about me' at closing session. I highlighted the importance of positive characteristics during the activity of 'The positive things about me' and gave examples of positive characteristics such as 'I like to learn new things' and 'I keep trying when I learn something new'.

Reflection-on-action enabled me to make some modifications to the research process to meet the specific needs of participants. For example, the spelling mistakes made by participants in the questionnaires indicated that I needed to use simple English to communicate with participants. Therefore, during closing session, I used simple wordings such as 'the positive things about me' instead of 'my strengths' to ensure that participants fully understood the instructions of the activity.

The findings of this study indicate that reflexivity of researcher is crucial to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

#### **4.3.4 Collaboration with school teachers**

Data analysis showed that collaboration with school teachers is vital to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention. The SENCO, drama teacher, head teacher and IT coordinator were very supportive and helpful. The SENCO and drama teacher helped me to identify a class of SEN and non-SEN children with an issue of peer rejection. The SENCO, drama teacher and head teacher of the class helped me to schedule time for three research sessions. The head teacher helped me to obtain written and verbal consent from participants' parents.

As an outsider entering the research school to conduct the creative arts intervention, my understanding of participants was limited. The SENCO, drama teacher and head teacher provided me the information regarding participants' background and peer interaction. In addition, I emailed the drama teacher the flow and the activities of three research sessions prior to the implementation of sessions to seek her feedback.

The drama teacher was present during introductory and closing sessions whereas the SENCO was present during intervention session. They gave me valuable feedback to improve my practice. For example, the drama teacher suggested that I used musical instrument to draw participants' attention instead of raising my voice. The SENCO suggested that I took greater precautions to ensure the safety of participants when they were going through the adventure as disabled people.

Moreover, the SENCO helped me to borrow the digital video recorder from the school. The IT coordinator helped me to convert the recording files and save the files in a CD. She also recommended to me the software program for editing.

The findings of this study demonstrate that collaboration with school teachers is essential to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

## **5 EVALUATION**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overall evaluation of the findings that emerged to answer two research questions. The discussion is linked to the literature review in chapter two. The first section links the learning experiences of participants in the creative arts intervention to contemporary learning theories, reflective learning and emotional literacy. The second section links the four important factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention to previous studies identified in the literature.

### **5.1 *The learning experiences of participants in the creative arts intervention aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children***

#### **5.1.1 Creative arts and social learning**

The findings of this study are theoretically coherent with contemporary learning theories which are social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1990). According to social development theory, collaborative learning theory and situated learning theory, learning is best achieved through social interaction rather than mere teaching.

The creative arts intervention engaged participants in social and collaborative learning. Collaboration made the learning process reciprocal and effective. Participants took ownership of and responsibility for their own learning in the reciprocal relationship when they worked as a team to create the forest and plan the journey to search for the magic drum. Participants' comments reflected their enthusiasm in working as a team:

- I like working as a team (P13).
- It was fun when we work as a team (AG).



- It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would lik (like) to do it again (P9).

According to Vygotsky (1978), effective learning experiences are organized within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where learners start from participating in a range of tasks they can do independently to tasks which require help from others. In this study, creative arts activities were designed according to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of participants. Participants engaged in problem solving activities which they could achieve independently and learnt new strategies with the help from peers and researcher.

The findings of this study are consistent with the argument of social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1990) that social and collaborative learning provide positive role-modeling and increase feelings of support. Participants had multiple opportunities to learn from peer modeling when they created the forest, climbed the big rock and crawled in the narrow cave as disabled person. Participants expressed their feelings of peer support by commenting that:

- I felt great with all the other people helping me and I liked helping them (P13).
- I felt good because it is good when somebody was helping you (P14).
- "Hm... I felt normal and better when like people were helping me when I couldn't like slide, with one hand like when I was trying my best, when people was pushing my feet or people trying to pull me out (FB).

Group work is one of the most effective ways to deflate adults' authoritarian role (Giroux, & Penna, 1988). This study enabled participants to share and learn from one another collectively. Participants became partners in their own learning experiences. Having some responsibility over their own learning experiences enhanced participants' engagement and motivation to relate to others in positive ways. Video analysis revealed

that participants engaged actively to help each other when they climbed the big rock and crawled in the narrow cave as disabled people.

The creative arts intervention facilitated authentic communication among participants and increased opportunities for participants to learn about differences. Participants engaged in dialogue when they worked together as a team to choose the disabled characters, create the forest and explore strategies to manage the challenges in their journey to search for the magic drum. Communication and dialogue enabled participants to share their experiences and ideas, see things from different perspectives, evaluate and re-evaluate their knowledge, and learn how to deal with various situations.

Peer collaboration contributed to participants' understanding of justice, willingness to share and care, and the development of creativity and critical thinking. Participants practised participatory democracy and learnt to appreciate reciprocity and differences. Video analysis revealed that participants listened and respected each other opinions which were different from theirs when they shared their thoughts and feelings in group interview and closing round activity.

Social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1990) argue that social and collaborative learning enhance collective commitment and group energy which motivate participants to stay on task. Creative arts activities are particularly good at engaging children in social and collaborative learning as it is unthreatening, enjoyable, relaxing and there are no right and wrong ways to do it. Video analysis revealed that participants' commitment and energy were high when they rehearsed several times to explore different strategies to help each other climb the big rock and crawl in the narrow cave as disabled people.

Creative arts activities encourage participants to be autonomous, active and playful. Video analysis revealed that most participants engaged enthusiastically throughout the

process. Thirteen out of sixteen participants asserted in the questionnaires that they would participate again in future. Their comments included:

- Yes I would because I'd like to learn more about them (P3).
- Yes I would in future participate because it would be a great fun (P5).
- Yes it was great fun (P6).
- It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would lik (like) to do it again (P9).
- Yes! It's fun! (P13).

Although thirteen out of sixteen participants enjoyed social and collaborative learning by indicating that they would participate again in future, two participants (P1, & P11) were not sure and one participant (P16) stated that he or she would not participate in future. This finding suggests that more in depth study needs to be conducted to gain deeper insights into every child's unique learning experience. Small focus group interview would have generated deeper understanding of some underlying issues that may inhibit the social learning process.

### **5.1.2 Creative arts and reflective learning**

Constructivist learning theory argues that meta-cognition is crucial in learning process (Bruner, 1966). The creative arts intervention engaged participants in reflective learning when participants enacted the disabled characters, rehearsed, stepped out of the characters, reflected and revised ideas.

Reflective learning enabled participants to generate new understanding of the problems, improvise and create different strategies to solve the problems. This is reflected in participants' efforts to rehearse several times in order to find different strategies to climb the big rock and crawl in the narrow cave as disabled people.

Reflective learning enhances the development of observation skills. Participants' comments on what they could do to create a better environment for disabled people

showed that they were observant of the existing facilities that accommodated the needs of disabled people. Their awareness was reflected in their comments:

- They have er like a lift ... they have like the number, the little dots that they can touches them and know which number it is (HB).
- Like we go to the tram, it tells where the station are, and then next station, so the blind people know where, when they will have to get off (AG).
- And also when at zebra crossing, it makes the sound like when to go (MG).
- Like people who can't hear, ya if they are at tram, they are like say which is the next place ... for people who can't hear, there are like writing on this kind of board, it helps them (BG).

Children are observant and have a rich understanding of their learning processes. Deep learning occurred when participants stepped back regularly to reflect and review on the learning progress. The questionnaires and group interview enabled participants to reflect on their learning experiences and gain deeper understanding of disabilities issues. Participants realized that:

- It doesn't mater (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something (P1).
- You have to work as a team to achieve something if you have a disability (P6).
- That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people (P12).
- That it doesn't matter if a person has a disability because everybody is good a (at) something (P13).
- When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths (EG).

Engaging in reflective learning, participants gained deeper understanding of themselves and others. When participants reflected on their thoughts, feelings and actions in the creative arts intervention, they were more aware of their own emotions and behavior. Participants learnt more about themselves and their peers through self reflection that

emerged from their observation of others during creative and playful exchanges. They realized that:

- I have disability, when eating like using chopsticks (CB).
- I felt good on the start but I know that if I had the disability forever that won't be nice (P12).
- I felt great with all the other people helping me and I liked helping them (P13).
- I felt good because it is good when somebody was helping you (P14).

### 5.1.3 Creative arts and emotional literacy

Emotional literacy is essential to children's holistic development (Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1996). The creative arts intervention provided multiple opportunities for participants to develop their emotional literacy. The storytelling, interactive games and dramatic play emphasized affirmation, communication and cooperative problem-solving. Participants learnt to share, take turns and negotiate with each other when choosing the disabled characters, deciding as a group how the story ended and going through the journey to search for the magic drum.

Cattanach (1994) asserts that creative arts such as dramatic play enable children to transform their life experiences through active engagement in a safe and symbolic space. Participants learnt to stretch themselves, explore possibilities, and take risks when their emotional and imaginative needs were met in the creative arts activities. They played and learnt together in creative, investigative and problem-solving manners. By engaging in an imaginative world, participants acted out problems and experimented with possible solutions through peer collaboration when rehearsing their adventure of climbing the big rock and crawling in the narrow cave as disabled people.

Creative arts have the potential to cultivate in children a capacity for empathetic understanding that will enable them to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from themselves, seeing them not as alien, but as human beings who share



many problems and possibilities with them (Nussbaum, 1997). Enacting roles in dramatic play offers boundless opportunities to portray the human condition.

Consistent with past study by Beck *et al.* (2003), enacting the roles of disabled characters enabled participants to experience how it felt to be disabled. The ability to feel becomes the foundation for participants to develop their capacity to care for others.

Participants' comments reflected that they realized that life was hard for disabled people:

- Different and I realized it is hard to have disability (P2).
- It wasn't the best feeling and it was hard (P3).
- I felt really weird and like I shouldn't be in this world (P5).
- I felt (felt) different (P6).
- I felt bad because I couldn't (couldn't) move my hands (P9).
- I feel sad for them and there (they) are not lucky (P10).

Dramatic play enables children to enter others' world in a form of 'as if' to better understand other people. Participants were not limited by their restricted life experiences when their imagination opened the doors for them to experience alternative realities. Being in someone else's shoes allowed participants to feel the suffering of others and look at things at different levels and in different ways as expressed by participants:

- It doesn't matter (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something (P1).
- That helping can be full of fun and friendship (P5).
- I learn that it is hard to help others (P10).
- We learn how life is like when you can't do things ... sometimes it just feels bad (BG).
- When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths (EG).

The creative arts intervention enabled participants to acknowledge their own vulnerability to misfortune. Participants were able to imagine that they might go through the same suffering experienced by disabled people who were different from them:

- I felt good when I was blind but I really didn't, I really don't want to be blind (GB).
- It was fun having my hands tied (cross both hands as if tied) but I don't want to be like that for the rest of my lives (HB).
- When I was being blind, I felt good but if I will be blind forever then it won't be nice (CB).
- It was fun, play but not for all of my life (IB).

By nurturing children's empathetic understanding, children develop the potential to become creative thinkers and problem-solvers. Participants were able to make some suggestions when asked what they could do to create a better environment for disabled people:

- May be you could design a club wich (which) will every day go somwhe (somewhere) to help the disability (disabled) people (P5).
- To be kind and helpful (helpful) (P7).
- Help them to move and say things (P8).
- Some hous (houses) for people without (with) disability (P9).
- try to help him and be friend with him (P12).
- I would say to everybody to help people with disability (P14).
- Build a school for children with disability so they can have extra care (KG).

The creative arts intervention has the potential to cultivate in children the ability to form moral decisions towards creating an inclusive society. The ability to feel for others' pain and suffering enabled participants to form a particular stand point:

- That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people (P12).
- ... it is mean to be to be staring or laughing on (at) people with disabilities (P13).

- Er... like people with disability need like, extra help, when you see them, you should really like, try to help them in the best way possible, because like, if blind people, if they are like, shopping or delicate things, you should like, show them the way so that they don't get into trouble ... Tell him show him, like hold his hands, like say go here, go there (FB).

Based on the tentative findings drawn from this study, the creative arts intervention has the potential to cultivate in children the ability to take moral action. Of the sixteen participants, five explained in the questionnaire that they would interact differently with disabled people after participating in this project as they knew how it felt to be disabled. Another five participants stated that they would help disabled people without indicating whether there were changes in their interaction with disabled people after participating in this project. Their comments include:

- Yes because I know now how hard it is for them (P4).
- Yes I would beacause (because) I would know how they feel. So Surely I would Help them =-) (P5).
- Yes because now I know how hard it is for them, and I will help them (P7).
- I would help him because he would need help from somebody for example if somebody was blind or couldn't walk or couldn't talk!' (P14).

Although majority of the participants were able to empathize with disabled people, this does not mean that they would necessarily behave positively toward disabled children. Behavior of participants after intervention was not measured directly in this study. Therefore, it is unclear whether the positive attitudes would be translated to actual behavior or intention to interact positively with SEN peer.

## **5.2 Factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children**

Although several studies in the past ten years have incorporated creative arts activities in interventions aiming to foster positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children, few studies to date have attempted to investigate factors that facilitate the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention.

This study has identified four important factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children. The four important factors are appropriate matching of the intervention to meet the specific needs of participants, active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants, reflexivity of researcher and collaboration with school teachers. The important factors identified in this study are consistent with those previously identified in the literature.

### **5.2.1 Appropriate matching of the intervention to meet the specific needs of participants**

The finding of this study is consistent with previous studies which emphasized the appropriate matching of the intervention strategy with specific needs of the targeted children (Gibb *et al.*, 2007; Spence, 2003; Gresham *et al.*, 2001). In this study, the creative arts intervention had been designed to meet the specific needs of participants.

By meeting the specific needs of participants, the creative arts intervention successfully enhanced participants' empathetic understanding of disabled people. Participants understood how it felt to be disabled.

Literature review indicates that interventions that enable non-SEN children to understand and accept differentiated behavior exhibited by their SEN peers highlight the

strengths of SEN children (Gibb *et al.*, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2007). In this study, participants were invited to enact disabled characters with different strengths such as very helpful and caring, good at skating, swimming, acting, singing, mathematic, playing basketball and playing guitar. Emphasis is focused on the similarities shared among participants to generate a sense of feelings that disabled children are 'just like me'. Some participants identified similarities between themselves and disabled children when they commented that:

- It doesn't matter (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something (P1).
- That it doesn't matter if a person has a disability because everybody is good a (at) something (P13).
- When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths (EG).
- I have disability, when eating like using chopsticks (CB).

Previous studies have identified co-operative learning strategies and collaborative problem solving as important factors in promoting positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children (Gibb *et al.*, 2007; Lindsay, 2007). In this study, SEN and non-SEN participants actively engaged in co-operative and collaborative problem solving. Collaborative problem solving enabled participants to listen, cooperate with each other, share ideas and develop solutions that represent the group's ideas.

Participants responded spontaneously and developed more flexible ways of thinking when the creative arts intervention met their specific needs. The story of the magic drum conveyed the message of respecting diversity in children's different abilities, dispositions and needs. Video analysis showed that participants were non-judgmental and acceptance of different opinions expressed by their peers in group interview and closing round activity.



The findings demonstrate that the appropriate matching of the creative arts intervention with specific needs of participants is vital to the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

### **5.2.2 Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants**

In recent years, researchers and practitioners have increasingly engaged SEN and non-SEN children to promote positive social interactions between them (Martinez *et al.*, 2006; Holtz *et al.*, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2003; Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006). The findings of this study are in line with previous studies (Ibid) that indicate the importance of active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants to foster positive peer interactions between them.

In order to facilitate active engagement with participants, this study adopted creative arts activities such as interactive games, storytelling, dramatic play and showcase. Creative arts engage with children's creative tendencies thus are intrinsically motivating and inclusive (Leitch, 2008). The intervention enabled participants to explore different social relationships, roles and symbolic meanings through the structure of creative arts activities. This study shares some commonalities with some action researchers who have begun to incorporate storytelling and creative arts to improve the quality of community life (Lykes, 2006).

Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants facilitated in participants a stronger sense of commitment to the process of learning. It made the learning process vivid and real for the participants and enabled SEN and non-SEN participants to interact in meaningful and enjoyable ways. Participants expressed their enjoyment in peer companionship by commenting that:

- That helping can be full of fun and friendship (P5).
- I like working as a team (P13).
- I felt good because it is good when somebody was helping you (P14).
- It was fun when we work as a team (AG).
- I enjoy the part where we have to build the ... you give us, and I enjoy the part where we have to help like people who couldn't see or people who needed help (FB).

The findings of this study correspond with previous study by Beck *et al.* (2003) which indicates that active learning approach engaging participants in role-playing is effective in cultivating participants' self-reported empathetic attitudes toward SEN peers. Active engagement in role-playing allowed participants to step into disabled people's shoes to better understand causal characteristics of disabled people. Participants' comments showed that they understood the possible limitations and frustrations experienced by disabled people:

- I felt bad because I couldn't move my hands (P9).
- We learn how life is like when you can't do things ... sometimes it just feels bad (BG).

Active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants through creative arts activities made the learning process enjoyable and challenging, thus encouraged participants to be autonomous, energetic and imaginative. Participants expressed their joy of engaging in creative arts activities by commenting that:

- I liked being blind a (and) the obstacles (obstacles) (P4).
- It was fun because we were acting (P9).
- It was fun being blind (P11).
- I enjoy being without eyes (GB).
- I enjoy the adventure (CB).

- I enjoy building the cave (JB).
- I enjoy building the rock and being blind (KG).
- I enjoy when we were building the rock, er... the cave (HB).
- I enjoy the part where we have to build the ... (FB).

Researchers have argued that there is a need to engage with pupils' unique knowledge and perspectives in school reform to build an inclusive school (Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006; Thomson, & Holdsworth, 2003; Rudduck, & Flutter, 2000). Pupils need to be perceived as co-educators and be actively involved in the efforts to foster the values of inclusion. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies (Martinez *et al.*, 2006; Holtz *et al.*, 2007; Frederickson *et al.*, 2003; Nicolaidou *et al.*, 2006) that indicate the importance of active engagement with SEN and non-SEN participants to foster positive peer interactions between them.

### 5.2.3 Reflexivity of researcher

Reflection occurs at every stage of action research. Reflexivity was vital to this action research because I played the dual roles of researcher and practitioner of the creative arts intervention. In this study, I engaged in a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity in the process of gathering evidence to make informed rather than intuitive judgements and decisions. Reflexivity enabled me to be aware of the impact of my values, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, actions and feelings (Schön, 1987) on the research process and the participants.

I engaged in reflection-on-action by contemplating and writing the reflective diary. I reflected and documented the patterns of participants' interactions, participants' feelings and thoughts, my feelings and thoughts, any dilemmas or issues arising during the research process and areas that needed improvement.

Reflexivity is crucial in action research that engaged children participants. Human beings especially children are constantly changing, growing and developing. The same group of participants brought their new selves to every research session. As an action researcher, I engaged in reflection-in-action by reflecting immediately, here and now in the research sessions and developed spontaneous responses geared towards the objectives of the research. Reflexivity enabled me to respond sensitively to the specific and unique needs of participants in a respectful way.

Reflexivity enabled me to acknowledge and contain the anxieties arising from the complexity of human nature and the unique and unpredictable nature of action research. The ability to reflect on my thoughts, feelings and actions enabled me to be more aware of the anxiety that the SEN participant evoked in me. Reflexivity enabled me to manage my anxiety by doing deep breathing.

Children are active constructors of their own world, they actively shape and direct their own social life (Christensen & Prout, 2005). This makes every child unique and special. The findings of this study indicate that action researchers engaging with children participants need to practice reflexivity in order to achieve the objectives of the action research.

#### **5.2.4 Collaboration with school teachers**

The findings of this study highlight the importance of collaboration with school teachers to ensure the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

Collaboration with school teachers enabled me to design and implement the creative arts intervention that met the specific needs of participants. The valuable feedback given by the drama teacher and SENCO helped me to improve my practice.

Action research is most emancipatory when it is a collaborative action research, engaging with groups of people to improve their professional lives (Elliott, 1991). Due to the limitations of time and resources, this study focused on the individual nature of action research to improve my practice. Nevertheless, I had attempted to engage the SENCO, drama teacher and head teacher of participants to influence change at the micro level of the classroom setting. I hope to arouse their interest to facilitate social inclusion in the school after the completion of my research.

The SENCO was very supportive of this study. She informed me that she has included photos of this research in the school newsletter. Indirectly, the SENCO helped to disseminate the aims of this study to the school community through the school newsletter.



## **6 CONCLUSION**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the evaluation of methods and research findings of this study, implications of the findings to my professional practice, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research into the use of creative arts to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs.

### **6.1 Evaluation of methods**

This action research is driven by the belief to respect children's rights to inclusive education (UN, 1989) and the view that child-centred research instruments are most effective in researching children's experiences (Greig *et al.*, 1999). This study contributes to the growing body of research evidence on good practice in researching children's experiences.

The findings demonstrate that the use of creative arts as research instruments is effective in cultivating participants' self-reported empathetic understanding toward SEN peers. Participants' engagement and communication were heightened owing to the focus on creative arts activities such as storytelling, dramatic play, interactive games and showcase. The findings indicate that the validity and reliability of this study were increased as different methods of data collection using questionnaire, group interview, video recording and reflective diary has produced substantially similar findings.

This study has generated a range of methodological and practical learning points. I learn that there is a need to improve on the methods of data collection. The fact that about three participants asked me to explain question three in the questionnaire indicated that question three appeared unclear to some participants, especially participants who are not native English speakers. Therefore, there is a need to pilot questionnaire and refine the contents, wording and length of the questionnaire to match the understanding level of participants.

As the intervention session was scheduled at the last two hours of the school day, video analysis showed that some participants looked tired towards the end of the intervention session when group interview with sixteen participants was conducted. This resulted in a short group interview which lasted about twelve minutes. Due to time constraints, question three was omitted in group interview to allocate more time to discuss other questions. The video recording revealed that three participants did not voice their views during group interview. Two of them are SEN children.

The group interview should be conducted in a different day. Small focus group interviews could provide more personal and detailed data which would increase the quality of explanations for the various findings. Small focus group interviews with four participants might encourage quiet participants to voice their views.

Video recording with one camera on two groups of participants increased the stress of making instant decisions about what to record. Conducting the intervention with one group of participants at a time would resolve this issue.

## **6.2 *Evaluation of findings***

This study is a small-scale exploratory study and the findings are tentative. The findings are theoretically coherent with contemporary learning theories, reflective learning and emotional literacy. The findings suggest that the creative arts intervention engaged participants in peer collaborative learning and reflective learning which contributed to the development of participants' emotional literacy. The findings also suggest that the creative arts intervention has the potential to cultivate in participants the capacity of empathetic understanding which is essential for fostering positive peer interaction among SEN and non-SEN children.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the creative arts intervention overemphasized the difficulties encountered by disabled people, resulted in majority of participants did not seem to get the message that everybody has strengths and difficulties or disabilities. In future, I would conduct video screening to present the positive characteristics of disabled people around the world and their success in different areas of achievement. Moreover, I would enrich the disabled characters in the dramatic play by emphasizing their strengths. I would invite participants to demonstrate their strengths when they enact the disabled characters. For example, the blind participants could sing to motivate others whereas the mute participants could be knowledgeable in identifying edible plants.

In addition, I would enrich the adventure by inviting participants to create some happenings in their journey. For example, participants encounter snake and one of the participants directs the group to react appropriately to avoid the danger. Another happening could be that one participant falls down and gets injured when climbing the big rock and the participants work collaboratively to carry him to continue the journey. I would also enrich the creative elements by bringing some props, cloths or boxes for participants to create the forest. This would enhance participants' creativity and collaboration.

I would also use musical instrument to draw participants' attention and take greater precautions to ensure the safety of participants when they go through the adventure as disabled people.

The tentative findings suggest that some participants held negative views on disabilities issues and the creative arts intervention failed to change their negative views. These negative views included perceptions that associated disability with 'something wrong' and 'not feeling normal':

- I learnd (learn) how hard it is to have something wrong with you (P7).

- I felt that people with disability are not feeling normal, so we try to be like them, so we know now how to help them to overcome it (LG).

Due to time constraints, participants did not have sufficient time to engage in deeper reflective learning and discussion to explore these negative perceptions. In future, I would facilitate one group of participants at a time with maximum eight participants in a group. By doing so, I would have more time to engage participants in deeper discussion on the themes of empathetic understanding, strengths and difficulties, and similarities and differences between disabled and non-disabled children. This would enable participants to develop a more balance and positive perceptions on disabilities issues.

### **6.3 Implications for practice**

Action research is a powerful tool for self-transformation (Bravette, 2006). Action research involves "a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity to the role of the self in mediating the whole research process" (Somekh, 2006: p.8). Lloyd's (2002) study reveals that teachers engaged in reflective action research were able to transform themselves and gain a deeper understanding of their practice.

This action research has helped me to develop a critical understanding of the use of creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs. The creative arts intervention could be used as part of an inclusive program to resolve the issue of peer rejection. It could also be implemented to create a supportive classroom environment prior to the inclusion of SEN children.

As a practitioner in an NGO in Malaysia, the key lessons learnt from this study would enable me to develop the creative arts intervention to meet the specific needs of participants in my effects to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs in Malaysia. I learn that it is important to design a balanced

intervention approach, focusing on creating an inclusive school ethos to foster positive peer interaction and equipping SEN children with necessary social skills to interact positively with their peers.

I also need to consider various implementation requirements. For example, different interventions will require different time and resource commitments. It is therefore essential to work closely with school teachers to understand the needs of participants and the expectations of school teachers. In future, I would engage with interested teachers in the assessment, implementation and evaluation process.

As a start, I would initiate the creative arts intervention with mainstream schools which have a good working relationship with my NGO in our joint-efforts to support SEN children in their schools. I would engage with all interested teachers to build on existing school resources and classroom strategies to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs. For example, teachers can embed the values of respect for diversity in primary school curriculum during moral lesson. The focus is to build longer-term capacity in the schools to develop an inclusive ethos.

Reflections on this study prompted consideration regarding the need to further increase parents' involvement. In future, I would collaborate with parents of SEN children in the assessment and evaluation process to gain deeper understanding of SEN children's development, family dynamic and the impact of creative arts intervention on SEN children.

#### **6.4 Limitations of study**

There are several important limitations in this study. There were only sixteen participants due to time constraints and barriers of accessibility to international schools. Two international schools have rejected my research proposal due to their busy schedules in May and June. Furthermore, it was difficult to identify a class with an issue of peer rejection between SEN and non-SEN children aged ten to eleven.



Due to time constraints, participants' behavior was not measured directly in this study. Although participants reported that they were empathetic towards disabled children following the intervention, the positive attitude may not necessarily translate into inclusive behaviour. Pre-test and post-test on participants' attitudes and behaviour were not measured. This study also did not investigate the effects of duration and frequency of sessions on the success of creative arts intervention.

### **6.5 Recommendations for future studies**

The findings of this study are encouraging and highlight the importance of future research in examining the use of creative arts interventions in promoting positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs.

Future research could expand upon the findings of the current study to investigate if participants' behaviors towards SEN peers are consistent with their reported empathetic understanding following the creative arts intervention. Future study could implement pre-test and post-test evaluation on participants' attitudes and behavior using direct observation of peer interactions, socio metric test or intended behavior measure to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Future research could also engage participants of different age groups.

Continued study into factors that determine the successful implementation of the creative arts intervention in fostering positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs is needed. Future study could examine the effects of duration and frequency of sessions on the success of creative arts intervention. Additional research could evaluate generalization of the intervention effects across time, persons and settings.

Peer rejection, victimization and bullying can be a lifelong process of frustration and alienation for SEN children. The negative long term social and psychological consequences of peer rejection, victimization and bullying on SEN children further

asserts the need for early and effective interventions to foster positive peer interactions among SEN and non-SEN children.

Interventions that enable non-SEN children to understand and accept differentiated behavior exhibited by their SEN peers help to build positive and collaborative relationships among SEN and non-SEN children. Most importantly, these interventions enable SEN children to develop friendships with non-SEN peers and join the social network of school, community and greater society.

The findings of this study demonstrate the potential of creative arts intervention in enabling children with diverse abilities and needs to form positive peer relationship. Future study would contribute to the development of a more inclusive society in which children with diverse abilities and needs could truly enjoy equal education opportunities to develop their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential.

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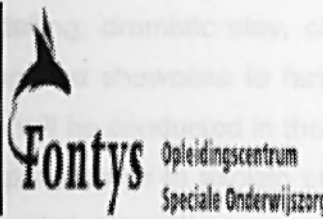
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## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT**

### **'The Magic Drum' in Action –**

#### **The use of creative arts to foster positive peer interaction**

#### **among children with diverse abilities and needs in a mainstream classroom**

##### **(1) What is the research about?**

The research attempts to facilitate positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs in a mainstream classroom through the use of storytelling and dramatic play. The research aims to sensitize participants' empathetic understanding of people with diverse abilities and needs. The researcher intends to facilitate the development of an inclusive and creative community in the participatory school which cultivates acceptance, respect and empathy in children.

##### **(2) Who is carrying out the research?**

The research is being conducted by Ms Min See Leong, a certified play therapist from Malaysia who is also a full member of British Association of Play Therapists. This research is to fulfill the completion of the researcher's M.A. Special Education Needs 2009/2010, a joint program between Roehampton University in London, Fontys University in The Netherlands and Charles University in Prague.

### **(3) What does the research involve?**

This research uses storytelling, dramatic play, child-friendly questionnaire, focus group interviews, video recording and showcase to facilitate active engagement with children participants. The research will be conducted in the participatory school. An initial meeting will be held with children participants to explain and discuss the research, to ensure that the children are happy to participate in the research.

During the second meeting, 'The Magic Drum', a story which conveys positive messages of the struggle experienced by children with diverse abilities and needs is narrated to the participants. Participants are invited to role play children with diverse abilities and needs searching for the magic drum. The research process emphasizes collaborative creative work, empathetic understanding and cooperation. An illustration of the story of 'The Magic Drum' is attached with Appendix B.

Focus group interview using child-friendly questionnaire will be conducted after debriefing. Participants are invited to reflect on their learning experience by responding to six research questions. The process of the dramatic play and focus group interview is video recorded.

The six research questions are:

1. How did you feel being a person with disability?
2. What do you like about the process of storytelling and dramatic play?
3. What do you not like about the process of storytelling and dramatic play?
4. What do you learn from participating in the process of storytelling and dramatic play?
5. Would you interact differently with people with disability after participating in storytelling and dramatic play? Please explain.

**6. What can we do to create a better environment for people with disability?**

At the third meeting, a showcase of the video recording is presented to the participants. Parents of the participants, teachers and staff of the participatory school are invited. Audience are invited to discuss the impact of storytelling and dramatic play in facilitating positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs.

**(4) How much time will the research take?**

The research involves three meetings with the participants. It is anticipated that the initial meeting with children participants will last approximately thirty minutes. The second meeting involving storytelling, enactment of the dramatic play and focus group interview will last approximately two hours. The third meeting which is the showcase of the video recording will last approximately one hour.

**(5) Can the participants withdraw from the research?**

Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Participants are not under any obligation to consent and if the participants do consent, they can withdraw for any or no reason at any time without affecting their relationship with the school.

**(6) Will anyone else know the results?**

All aspects of the research, including information provided by the participants will be kept confidential and anonymous. The report and the video recording of the research may be used for future research, teaching, exhibition, presentation or publication purposes but individual participants and participatory school will not be identifiable.

**(7) Will the research benefit the participants?**

This research gives children participants a voice to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to the impact of creative arts in fostering social inclusion. The findings of this

research contribute to the development of a creative arts model aiming to create an inclusive school ethos in Prague and the researcher's home country. It also contributes to the growing body of research evidence on good practice in researching children's experiences.

**(8) Will the research bring any harm to the participants?**

The majority of children benefit from participating in creative arts activities. Please feel free to communicate to the researcher any concerns related to the research. The well being of the children participants is the paramount consideration in the attempts to resolve any ethical issues arising during the research.

**(9) Can the participants tell other people about the research?**

The participants may discuss this research with others if they choose. The participants are reminded not to say personal things about another outside of the group.

**(10) What if the participants require further information?**

If the participants would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Min See Leong on [minsee@gmail.com](mailto:minsee@gmail.com) (email).

**(11) What if the participants have a complaint or concerns?**

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of the research can contact the Head of participatory school.

**This information statement is for the participants to keep**



### The Magic Drum

'Once upon a time, there was a special village in a far away country. What made it special was there were quite a number of villagers who were different from others. They had different abilities and needs. Among them were children. Some of these children were very good at singing and acting although they had difficulties with spelling or mathematic. Some of them were very good swimmers although they were very active. Some of them were very helpful and caring although they were disabled.

These children went to school just like all of you. But, they faced a number of challenges in schools because they were different. Sometimes, they felt very frustrated and upset when they were struggling to learn and make friends in school.

One night, one of the children had a dream. She dreamt of her grandmother who had passed away. The grandmother was a very wise and well-respected woman in the village. Her grandmother told her in the dream, "My beloved granddaughter, I know you are struggling with your schooling because you are different. At the eastern part of the village, there is a thick forest. There is a magic drum in the forest which has special powers. If all the children from the village hit it together at the same time a miracle will happen.

It is a very challenging journey. You have to go through the thick forest where unknown danger and adventure await you. You cannot do it alone. You can invite all the children in the village to go with you to search for the magic drum. You have to work as a team to help each other in this journey."

The child woke up in excitement. She quickly spread the news and invited all the children to join her in the journey. All of them decided that they were going to take up the challenge...'

## CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I have read and understood the Participant Information Statement of the research project: 'The Magic Drum' in Action - The use of creative arts to foster positive peer interaction among children with diverse abilities and needs in a mainstream classroom. I have had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and have received satisfying explanatory information regarding any aspect of this research.

My child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. I understand that my child can withdraw for any or no reason at any time without affecting his or her relationship with the school.

I understand that all aspects of the research, including information provided by my child will be kept confidential and anonymous. The report and the video recording of the research may be used for future research, teaching, exhibition, presentation or publication purposes but individual participant and participatory school will not be identifiable.

I understand that I will have ongoing opportunities to communicate to the researcher any concerns I have related to the research. I understand that the well being of my child is the paramount consideration in the attempts to resolve any ethical issues arising during the research.

I understand that I will be informed of the conclusion of the research, and will be given an electronic copy of the research findings (in English) should I require one.

I agree to involve my child as a voluntary participant of the research.

Child's Name and Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to the Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Consent form adapted from British Educational Research Association (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.*

**'The Magic Drum' in Action: Introductory Session****Introduction**

Good afternoon, children. I am very happy to meet all of you today. My name is Min See. I am from Malaysia. I am a student and I study in Charles University. I am studying about education for all children including children with disabilities or special educational needs.

I am here today to ask you to help me with my study project. My project is about supporting children including children with disabilities to have friends in school. Children with disabilities are like you and me, they like to have friends to talk to and play with. My project will involve storytelling and dramatic play.

Children, do you like to listen to story? How about acting? Do you like to act? If you agree to join this project, we will do some creative activities together on Wednesday. I will tell you a story and then you will act out the story in the group. After that, we will share our thoughts and feelings about the activities in the group. You will also write down your thoughts and feelings.

When you all are acting out the story, my friend will record it with video camera. We will watch the video recording together on another day. You would see yourself in this big screen, acting. Any question?

It is ok if you agree to join the project and change your mind later and decide not to join the project at any time. You do not need to explain why. When I write my project report, I will not write your name and your personal information. People who read my project report will not know what you have shared in the group. Any question?

Now, we will do some activities together. After the session, I will ask you individually whether you would like to join this project.

### **Game 1 – Help me to move on**

Everybody walks around with a toy on his or her head. If the toy falls down, you have to stop and stand still. Your friend will help you to move on by picking up your toy, putting it on your head and you can continue moving around.

### **Game 2 – Let us create**

Form four groups, four people in one group. Each group will create a vehicle using your body (motorbike, bus, ship, aeroplane). When you are ready, each group will take turn to perform the creation and the audience will guess what vehicle your group is. When you perform, you will take the role of a person with disability. You will either be physically impaired, visually impaired or mute. We will use some props here to turn you into a disabled person. Remember to work as a team to help each other.

### **Group Discussion**

Debriefing: You are not a person with disability now. You are back to yourself. Let us share our thoughts and feelings. What do you learn from the activities?

### **Game 3 - Dinosaur**

Everyone pretends that you are an egg walking around the room. You play scissor, paper and rock with your friend. The winner will become chicken. If chicken win again, it will become dinosaur. We will play the game until everyone has become dinosaur. We will help each other to become dinosaur.

### **Game 4 – Flower, flower, when are you blossom?**

Everyone stand in circle, holding hand. One child becomes a flower, standing in the middle. The group ask, 'Flower, flower, when are you blossom?' If the flower says 'Today', then the group holds the hands tight because the blossom flower would try to break out and go out of the garden. If the flower goes out, the flower will choose someone to be the new flower.

### **Closure - Say something positive to your friend sitting on your left**

### The Magic Drum



1. How did you feel being a person with disability?
2. What do you learn from participating in this project?
3. Would you interact differently with people with disability after participating in this project? Please explain.



Thank you very much!



#### 4. What can you do to create a better environment for people with disability?

##### Questionnaires Part One

#### 1. How did you feel being a person with disability?

##### Negative feelings: 12 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P1	Not really (really) good
P2	Different and I realised I had to live disability
P3	It wasn't the best feeling and it was hard
P4	It felt hard
P5	I felt really (really) weird and like I shouldn't be in the world
P6	I felt (felt) different
P7	Different (Different)
P8	I felt bad because you can't do things
P9	I felt bad because I couldn't (couldn't) move my hands
P10	I feel sad for them and there (they) are not happy
P11	A little strange but it was ok
P12	I felt good on the start but I know that if I had the disability forever that won't be nice.

#### 6. What do you not like about the project?

#### 7. Would you like to participate again in future? Please explain.

##### Positive feelings: 4 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P13	I felt great with all the other people helping me and I liked helping them
P14	I felt good because it is good when someone is helping you



Thank you very much!

## Questionnaires Findings

## 1. How did you feel being a person with disability?

## Negative feelings: 12 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P1	Not really (really) good
P2	Different and I realized it is hard to have disability
P3	It wasn't the best feeling and it was hard.
P4	It felt hard
P5	I felt really (really) weird and like I shouldn't be in this world
P6	I felt (felt) different
P7	Diffrent (Different)
P8	I felt bad because you cannot sometimes do things.
P9	I felt bad because I couldnt (couldn't) move my hands.
P10	I feel sad for them and there (they) are not lucky.
P11	A little strange but it was ok.
P12	I felt good on the start but I know that if I had the disability forever that won't be nice.

## Positive feelings: 4 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P13	I felt great with all the other people helping me and I liked helping them
P14	I felt good because it is good when somebody was helping you.

P15	I think it is fun
P16	Very happy

## 2. What do you learn from participating in this project?

### Team work: 6 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P2	Teamwork, fun and creating things
P3	Teamwork, friendliness
P4	Teamwork.
P6	You have to work as a team to achieve something if you have a disability
P8	I learned team work in this project.
P14	I learned team work from tis (this) project.

### Helping others: 5 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P5	That helping can be full of fun and friendship.
P9	I (lurnd) learn that I should help people.
P10	I learn that it is hard to help others.
P11	That you always have to help each other.
P15	Helping others.

**Friendship: 2 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P3	Teamwork, friendliness.
P5	That helping can be full of fun and friendship.

**Creating things: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P2	Teamwork, fun and creating things.

**Disabled people were good at something: 2 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P1	It doesn't mater (matter) if you are disabled you are still good at something
P13	That it doesn't matter if a person has a disability because everybody is good a (at) something.

**Life was hard for disabled people: 2 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P7	I learnd (learn) how hard it is to have something wrong with you.
P12	That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people.

**One must be gentle with disabled people: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P12	That is not funny having disabilities and you must be gentle with disabilities (disabled) people.

**Not sure: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P16	Not sure

**3. Would you interact differently with people with disability after participating in this project? Please explain.**

**Yes, participants knew how it felt to be disabled: 5 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P3	Yes because now I know what it feels.
P4	Yes because I know now how hard it is for them.
P5	Yes I would beacause (because) I would know how they feel. So Surely I would Help them ==)
P7	Yes because now I know how hard it is for them, and I will help them
P15	Yes because I know it is hard.

**No: 3 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P1	No I wouldn't help him because I don't know him
P12	I would do the same as I was doing before: being sorry for him and hoping I won't have a disability
P13	No because it is mean to be to be staring or laughing on (at) people with disabilities



**Help them (Participants did not indicate whether there were changes in their interaction with disabled people after participating in this project): 5 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P6	I would behaved (behave) by helping that person.
P9	I would help the person.
P10	Help them.
P11	help them.
P14	I would help him because he would need help from somebody for example if somebody was blind or couldn't walk or couldn't talk!

**Not sure or did not respond to the question: 3 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P2	? Not sure
P8	(blank)
P16	Not sure.

**4. What can you do to create a better environment for people with disability?**

**Help them: 12 participants**

Participants	Feelings
P2	Help Them
P3	help people with disability
P4	Help them out

P6	We can help them if they are struggling (struggling)
P7	To be kind and helpful (helpful).
P8	Help them to move and say things.
P10	to be helpful
P12	try to help him and be friend with him.
P13	Help them more
P14	I would say to everybody to help people with disability.
P15	help them
P16	Tell them which (which) way to go.

#### **Design a club to help disabled people: 1 participant**

Participants	Feelings
P5	May be you could design a club which (which) will every day go somewhere (somewhere) to help the disability (disabled) people.

#### **Houses for disabled people: 1 participant**

Participants	Feelings
P9	Some houses (houses) for people without (with) disability.

#### **School for disabled children: 1 participant**

Participants	Feelings
P11	make a school (school) for children with disability because people will care more about them.

**Did not know: 1 participant**

Participants	Feelings
P1	I don't know

**5. What do you like about the project?****Acting to be disabled: 4 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P2	Learning how it is to be disable (disabled)
P4	I liked being blind a (and) the obstacles (obstacles).
P9	It was fun because we were acting.
P11	It was fun being blind

**Being creative: 3 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P1	creative and fun
P3	Part that you had to create a certain thing
P5	That we got to be creative and helpful

**Going through the adventure: 3 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P4	I liked being blind a (and) the obstacles (obstacles).
P10	To go have adventures (adventure).

P12	The adventure I had.
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### Working as a team: 2 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P6	That we worked like a team.
P13	I like working as a team

### Helping: 2 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P5	That we got to be creative and helpful.
P7	I like that you whont (want) to help disabled children.

### The magic drum: 1 participant

Participants	Descriptions
P16	The magic Drum.

### Everything: 3 participants

Participants	Descriptions
P8	everything.
P14	everything
P15	everything

## 6. What do you not like about the project?

**That we went last in the performance: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P2	That we went last

**Could not share ideas when being mute: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P5	I don't think I didn't like something about the project only one thing being mute you can't share your ideas

**Nothing: 12 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P1	Nothing
P3	Nothing
P4	Nothing
P6	Nothing
P7	Nothing
P8	Nothing.
P10	Nothing
P11	Nothing
P12	Nothing
P13	I like everything
P14	Nothing



P15	nothing
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**Not sure: 2 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P9	I dont (don't) know
P16	not sure

**7. Would you like to participate again in future? Please explain.**

**Yes: 13 participants**

**It was fun: 8 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P2	Yes because it was fun.
P4	Yes because it was fun
P5	Yes I would in future participate because it would be a great fun.
P6	Yes it was great fun.
P7	Yes because it was fun.
P8	Yes because it was fun.
P9	It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would lik (like) to do it again.
P13	Yes! It's fun!

**To learn more about disabled people: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P3	Yes I would because I'd like to learn more about them.

**To work with others: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P9	It was fun and I like fun and work with others so I would lik (like) to do it again (P9).

**Yes: 4 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P10	Yes
P12	Yes.
P14	<u>Yes/No</u>
P15	Yes

**Did not know or did not respond: 2 participants**

Participants	Descriptions
P1	I don't know
P11	(Blank)

**No: 1 participant**

Participants	Descriptions
P16	No

## Interview Findings

## 1. How did you feel being a person with disability?

## Negative feelings: 8 participants: 2 girls, 6 boys

Participants	Descriptions
AG	Sad for people who have problems.
BG	Different and a bit hard to go through ...
DB	It was hard.
JB	It was hard when we like, it was really hard when you have like disability.
CB	When I was being blind, I felt good but if I will be blind forever then it won't be nice.
GB	I felt good when I was blind but I really didn't, I really don't want to be blind.
HB	It was fun having my hands tied (cross both hands as if tied) but I don't want to be like that for the rest of my lives.
IB	It was fun, play but not for all of my life.

## Positive feelings: 2 participants: 1 girl, 1 boy

Participants	Descriptions
EG	I felt ok when I helped other people and the other people helped me.
FB	Hm... I felt normal and better when like people were helping me when I couldn't like slide, with one hand like when I was trying my best, when people was pushing my feet or people trying to pull me out.

## 2. What do you learn from participating in this project?

### Helping others: 2 participants: 1 girl, 1 boy

Participants	Descriptions
LG	I felt that people with disability are not feeling normal, so we try to be like them, so we know now how to help them to overcome it.
FB	Er... like people with disability need like extra help, when you see them, you should really like try to help them in the best way possible, because like if blind people, if they are like shopping or delicate things, you should like show them the way so that they don't get into trouble ... Tell him show him, like hold his hands, like say go here, go there.

### Disabled people were good at something: 1 girl

Participants	Descriptions
EG	When people have a disability, they are also good at other things. Everybody has his disability and everybody has his strengths.

### Life was hard for disabled people: 2 participants: 1 girl, 1 boy

Participants	Descriptions
HB	Er.. I learn that it is hard for the people with disabilities, that it is hard like move thing ...
BG	We learn how life is like when you can't do things ... sometimes it just feel bad.

### I had disability: 1 boy

Participants	Descriptions
CB	I have disability, when eating like using chopsticks.

### 3. What can you do to create a better place for people with disability?

#### Facilities in transport system: 4 girls, 1 boy

Participants	Descriptions
BG	Er... for blind people, like in the metro, there are elevators, and in the elevator, they cannot see, like one or two, and they make like (her hands move around as if touching something) for blind people to ...
HB	They have er like a lift ... they have like the number, the little dots that they can touches them and know which number it is.
AG	Like we go to the tram, it tells where the station are, and then next station, so the blind people know where, when they will have to get off.
MG	And also when at zebra crossing, it makes the sound like when to go.
BG	Like people who can't hear, ya if they are at tram, they are like say which is the next place ... for people who can't hear, there are like writing on this kind of board, it helps them.

#### Build special school: 1 girl

Participants	Descriptions
KG	Build a school for children with disability so they can have extra care.



#### 4. What do you like about the project?

It was fun: 7 participants: 3 girls, 2 boys, 2 participants who could not be identified  
(Video camera captured the voices without identifying the speakers)

Participants	Descriptions
LG	It was fun and felt like helpful.
DB	It was fun.
AG	It was fun when we work as a team.
MG	It was fun.
FB	It was fun.
	It was fun.
	It was fun.

#### Working as a team: 2 girls

Participants	Descriptions
EG	Working as a team.
AG	It was fun when we work as a team.

#### Helping: 1 girl

Participants	Descriptions
LG	It was fun and felt like helpful.

#### Everything: 2 participants who could not be identified

Participants	Descriptions
	Everything.

	Everything.
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**5. What do you not like about the project? Or is there anything that we can do differently?**

**Suggestion to enact deaf character: 1 girl suggested the idea when the group discussed question 1**

Participants	Descriptions
KG	Why didn't we do like, like people who cannot hear ... like putting ... (hands block her ears) in the ear.

**Take precaution to create safer place for the blind: 1 girl**

Participants	Descriptions
EG	May be more safer for the blind one because if I don't know if other people like they say like go here (tap the table), and then they might not hear it well, and then they ... (both hands wide open)

**Nothing: 3 participants: 1 girl, 2 participants who could not be identified**

Participants	Descriptions
KG	Nothing.
	Nothing.
	Nothing.

### Round Findings

"Let's go one round for everybody to share what they would like to say. It is ok to say pass if you feel you have nothing to say."

#### Enjoy acting to be disabled: 2 participants: 1 boy, 1 girl

Participants	Descriptions
GB	I enjoy being without eyes.
KG	I enjoy building the rock and being blind.

#### Enjoy being creative: 5 participants: 3 boys, 2 girls

Participants	Descriptions
HB	I enjoy when we were building the rock, er... the cave.
FB	I enjoy the part where we have to build the ... you give us, and I enjoy the part where we have to help like people who couldn't see or people who needed help.
JB	I enjoy building the cave.
KG	I enjoy building the rock and being blind.
OG	Going through the cave and making the rock.

#### Enjoy the adventure: 2 participants: 1 boy, 1 girl

Participants	Descriptions
CB	I enjoy the adventure.
OG	Going through the cave and making the rock.

**Enjoy helping: 1 boy**

Participants	Feelings
FB	I enjoy the part where we have to build the ... you give us, and I enjoy the part where we have to help like people who couldn't see or people who needed help.

**Enjoy everything: 3 participants: 2 girls, 1 boy**

Participants	Feelings
EG	I enjoy everything.
DB	I enjoy all of it and I feel it is hard for disabled people.
NG	I enjoy everything.

**I feel it is hard for disabled people: 1 boy**

Participants	Feelings
DB	I enjoy all of it and I feel it is hard for disabled people.

**21/5/2010, Friday: Receiving email from drama teacher**

The drama teacher stated that the flow and the activities of the introductory sessions should be fine with her pupils. I felt good and I looked forward to Monday's session.

**24/5/2010, Monday: Introductory Session**

The head teacher has helped me to obtain written and verbal consent from parents. She is very supportive.

During the session, I noticed that one of the SEN participants, Ann (Pseudonym) was sitting on a chair outside of her group when her group was sitting on the floor discussing how to create the vehicle. I decided to invite Ann to join her group in my attempts to facilitate positive peer relationship between herself and her peers. I decided to respect her right to act on her own free will if she chose not to participate after my invitation. When I approached Ann and asked whether she would like to join the group, she complained about a group member. One of her group members immediately invited Ann to join them, and she joined the group. I felt relieved.

I observed that all children participated in the activities. They were keen to be in the centre of attention. When asked who would like to be the flower in the centre, everyone raised hand. They were responsive and interactive when they were asked what they learnt from the activity of 'Let us create'. Their responses included 'work as a team, listen, everyone participates'. Everyone was able to say something positive to the person sitting on their left. Their comments included 'Thank you for picking up the airplane for me, thank you for being my friend'. All of them agreed to join the project when asked individually after the session.

Game 3 and 4 were added as there were some spare time. I learn that it is important to plan extra activities. Based on participants' active responses in today's session, I feel quite confident that the participants would engage actively with the activities during intervention session. I observed that children naturally formed same-gender groups. For intervention session, I would suggest to the participants to form mixed-gender groups.

**26/5/2010, Wednesday: Intervention Session**

During the session, I noticed that Ann was crying when her group was busy discussing how to create a big rock. I was aware of my anxiety. I tried to relax by doing deep breathing before I approached Ann. I asked Ann gently what happened. Ann showed me one of her fingers with a plaster and said a boy hurt her finger when he held her hands. The boy looked uneasy and



**Reflective Diary****27/4/2010, Tuesday: Meeting with SENCO**

I met the SENCO of an international school to discuss my research proposal. The SENCO suggested that I conduct the intervention with a class of year 6 students and use drama lesson as the intervention involves dramatic play. The SENCO and drama teacher commented that the project is interesting. They are very helpful and supportive in helping me to identify the potential participants. Unfortunately the year 6 head teacher has been absent and it is not possible to conduct the research during his absence. The SENCO suggested a class of year 5 students.

**20/5/2010, Thursday: Meeting with year 5 head teacher, year 6 head teacher of another class, drama teacher and the SENCO**

After some delay due to the absence of the year 6 head teacher, finally I had a meeting with year 5 head teacher, year 6 head teacher of another class, drama teacher and the SENCO to discuss the implementation of the research. I felt relieved. Year 5 class has three SEN children whereas year 6 class does not have any SEN children although two children are receiving learning support from SENCO. After discussion, I suggested to recruit participants from year 5 class because there are three SEN children and there is an issue of peer rejection.

The year 5 head teacher, drama teacher and SENCO helped me to schedule time for conducting three research sessions. The SENCO, drama teacher and head teacher provided me the information regarding the children's background and their peer interaction. The drama teacher informed me that the children generally enjoy her drama lesson. I modified the story of the magic drum by incorporating the learning difficulties experienced by three SEN children and designed creative arts activities for introductory session. I emailed drama teacher to ask her feedback regarding the flow and the activities of the introductory sessions that I intend to conduct.

explained that it was an accident. I reflected that Ann felt the pain when the boy accidentally held her injured finger. Ann said the boy did it on purpose and it was not the first time. The boy denied. I decided to take care of both Ann's feelings and the boy's feelings in my attempts to resolve the conflict. I empathized with Ann by reflecting that her injured finger must have made her felt very painful. Ann nodded. I then explained that it was an accident and suggested that the boy apologized to Ann. The boy apologized and Ann accepted his apology. Ann then joined her group to create the big rock.

When participants were filling in the questionnaire, about three participants asked me to explain question three in the questionnaire. I realized that some participants may have difficulties understanding question three but felt shy to ask. I decided to explain question three to the whole group by giving an example. I learn that flexibility, adaptability and sensitivity are vital when working with participants of different abilities and needs.

After watching the video recording and reading the questionnaires, I realized that the intervention session over-emphasized the difficulties experienced by disabled people. Majority of participants did not seem to get the message that everybody has strengths and difficulties or disabilities.

In order to emphasize that 'Everybody has his or her own strengths and difficulties', I decided to incorporate the activity 'The positive things about me' at closing session. I would highlight the importance of positive characteristics during the activity and give examples of positive characteristics such as 'I like to learn new things' and 'I keep trying when I learn something new'.

The spelling mistakes made by participants in the questionnaires indicated that I need to use simple English to communicate with participants. Therefore, during closing session, I would use simple wordings such as 'the positive things about me' instead of 'my strengths' to ensure that participants fully understand the instructions of the activity. I learn that it is important to make modifications to the research process to meet the specific needs of participants.

After the session, I returned the digital video recorder to the IT coordinator. She helped me to convert the files to mpg and save the files in a CD. She also explained to me the software program I could use for editing. She was very helpful and supportive.

### **31/5/2010, Monday: Closing Session**

I noticed that girls actively gave comments to boys and girls about their strengths whereas boys were more active and responsive when they talked about boys' strengths. Boys tended to relate their strengths to the achievement in academic or sports such as good at math, basketball, drawing comics or very clever. Girls tended to relate their strengths to characteristics such as kind, caring, helpful, learn new things, make new friends.

Ann appeared sensitive when peer described one of her strengths as 'funny'. She crossed her hands and said loudly, 'I am not funny'. The peer immediately told her that it was positive but she still looked angry. The word funny has been used to describe other participants' strength and none of them were offended. The class laughed when the video screening showed the part where Ann accidentally hit the teacher who was holding the chair when Ann was climbing down the rock. Ann was angry, she said loudly, 'It was an accident!'. Ann seems to take things seriously and get offended easily.

All the participants appeared to enjoy the showcase. They laughed and talked when they watched themselves appearing on the LCD screen. They also requested to watch all the segments of the video recording.

Due to technical problem, the CD did not work with the LCD in the drama room. I decided to start with the activity 'The positive things about me' to allocate time for the drama teacher to sort out the technical problem. I learn that flexibility is crucial. The CD worked with the LCD in another year 5 classroom. All of us moved to that classroom for showcase. The teacher from another year 5 class was very helpful. I notice that the teachers are cooperative and supportive of each other.

During the evaluation session, the drama teacher suggested that I used musical instrument to draw participants' attention instead of raising my voice. The SENCO suggested that I took greater precautions to ensure the safety of participants when they went through the adventure as disabled people. The SENCO told me she has included photos of this project in school newsletter. She is very supportive of this study. Indirectly she helps to disseminate the aims of this study to the school community through the newsletter.